

2: COLLABORATION

Throughout the course of my time on this planet, I have observed our changing political landscape, resulting from a countless number of elections and the shifting of power from one administration to the next, both nationally, and locally. With the shifting of power comes the infighting between the parties ... each one with a different agenda and their own unique set of policies and programs. While the infighting could sometimes be boisterous and intense, we have historically found a way to create some sense of bipartisanship on critical issues while treating each other with respect and dignity (for the most part).

Congressmen and Senators were often seen dining together or sharing their dogmatic views of what they felt needed to be done in our country over a few drinks in one of the popular D.C. watering holes. Ronald Regan found a way to work with Tip O'Neal. Bill Clinton found a way to work with Knute Gingrich. Lyndon Johnson garnered republican support to pass the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

President Reagan worked with a Democratic Congress to pass comprehensive immigration and tax reforms in the 80's. President Clinton worked with a Republican Congress to reform welfare and to begin creating federal surpluses. Years ago, reaching across the aisle was not like reaching across the Grand Canyon, as is the case today.

Yes, there were times when everyone voted according to party lines; however, that occurred with much less frequency than we are experiencing at this time in our country's existence. Our practice of voting 50/50 on key issues is eroding our democracy. Everyone is firmly entrenched and committed to following the party line ... no matter what! Afterall, their ability to be reelected, appointed to key committees, and maintain power and control is totally dependent on their marching together, like lemmings on their last fateful journey to the sea.

The problem with this practice of diehard allegiance to the parties' causes is that while one side might win, America eventually loses (*the darkness*). The best ideas, policies and results come from collaboration ... sharing opposite views in search of a common middle-ground approach to legislation, new policies, and regulations.

An atmosphere of bipartisanship breeds budget stability, cost savings, a reduction in inefficiencies, and a long-term outlook regarding what is best for America (*the light*). Every time there is a change in the administration, previous plans, policies, and strategies (from the prior administration) are thrown out the window. This practice repeats itself with the next change in the administration. What businesses could survive under that management model?

What is needed is a "Committee for Bipartisanship" in Congress where a group of moderate representatives, senators and the current administration can work together to create

areas of common ground to establish legislation with the long-term interests of our country in mind ... legislation that both parties can agree on. Once that stage is set, we can begin working on the difficult, but solvable, issues at hand.

Civility and Respect

For collaboration to succeed, it must be built on a foundation of mutual respect and operate in an environment of civility. With the passing of each year, we see a decline in our civility and an increase in lack of respect for each other.

It wasn't that long ago when shouting out at our President during the State of the Union Address was unthinkable. Cursing at a fellow legislator on the floor of the House or Senate was unheard of. What has happened to our manners, our decorum, and our common respect for the opinions of others? What has happened to the commitment to embrace the tradition, integrity, and sanctity of our legislative institutions? What has happened to the principle of disagreeing with each other without being disagreeable?

Even during the heat of a presidential election, Senator John McCain defended his opponent, Senator Barack Obama, when a woman in the audience, at a presidential townhall, tried to slur his patriotism and his heritage. Senator McCain responded to her by saying, "No mam. He is a decent man and a citizen who I have disagreements with, but he is a good and honorable man."

It is no longer uncommon to see and hear heated discourse turn into shouting, vitriol, cursing, and name calling in our hallowed halls of the House and Senate. Common decency, courtesy and mutual respect have become a thing of the past.

Beyond the mutual lack of respect for each other, is the disturbing increase in hostile, violent behavior that is becoming more and more prevalent in our political and social cultures.

More than 1,000 people have been charged in conjunction with the attack on our nation's capital on January 6, 2021. That attack resulted in the death of at least two individuals and a countless number of life-altering injuries to others.

Armed protestors staged a rally (against the covid virus shutdown regulations) on the steps of the capital building in Michigan. A man who had planned to travel from Delaware to Michigan to kidnap Gov. Gretchen Whitmer at her vacation home, and assassinate her, was sentenced to 19 years and seven months in prison.

Paul Pelosi (former Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi's husband) was viciously attacked by a man with a hammer in their residence while attempting to harm his wife. He later stated that "Washington was an evil place."

A number of incidents of civil unrest culminating from alleged police brutality have led to rioting and looting in some of our major cities in this country.

White supremacy protests, civil disobedience, and threats of violence to political office holders and judicial appointees are on the rise.

Violence is becoming the order of the day!

Immigration

A clear and obvious area where collaboration is desperately needed is in establishing a consistent, uniform, and equitable immigration policy. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 was spearheaded by Lyndon Johnson and passed into law on October 3, 1965. This legislative accomplishment significantly altered immigration demographics in the country for the first time since it was founded.

The passage of the law was truly bipartisan, despite Democratic control of the White House, Senate, and House of Representatives. In the Senate, the bill was approved by a vote of 76 to 18, with support from 52 Democrats and 24 Republicans. The House passed the bill 320 to 70: 202 Democrats and 117 Republicans supported it, while 60 Democrats and ten Republicans

voted against it. Not only did the bill win support from the majorities of both parties in the House and Senate, in each body, more Democrats opposed the bill than Republicans!

Our lawmakers approved the measure without significant floor debate—deferring to the expertise of the judiciary committees and their immigration subcommittees to craft the proposal. President Johnson focused his attention, not on policy details and advancing the White House’s immigration agenda, but on the process of moving the bill forward through Congress. In today’s hostile political climate, congressional gridlock, and polarized, high-stakes immigration debate, lawmakers could learn from the process that led to the law’s swift passage back in 1965.

Many years prior to 1965, a despotic dictator captured the hearts and minds of millions of his countrymen. He was a skilled orator and a crafty salesman.

This dictator was able to *sell* his followers on the belief that their society was “not pure” and needed to be purged of the human pestilence that he said was enveloping and “poisoning” their country. More specifically, he was pointing to the Jews and other factions (Roma & Sinti Gypsies, homosexuals, the disabled, Poles, and others) that had to “be removed” to keep their Germanic race pure and pristine. According to Pew Research, this dictator had a 90% favorable rating in his country in 1939!

Once all the non-desirables were identified, they were then collected and forced to live in Ghettos, isolated towns or placed in captivity. This required the dictator’s minions to physically transfer large groups of people to new locations.

Those being transferred were told that they would be safe and that good things awaited them once they were resettled (jobs and security). For some of the oppressed, work offered a temporary lifeline, as those who were being used for labor often received extra rations (although these were very minimal) and were less likely to be chosen for deportation lists (and eventual extermination).

Fast-forward to 80 years later. We live in a country that was built on the backs of immigrants. Yes, we are a nation comprised of people who made the decision to leave their homelands to find peace, freedom, and opportunity (*the light*). While not physically forced to

leave their countries (in most cases), many of our immigrants had no choice if they were going to survive and prosper someday, due to the unrest, violence, and oppression where they came from (*the darkness*).

Today we have “legal immigrants” who are being collected by government officials and told lies regarding where they will be moved to and what opportunities await them when they arrive there. They are being transported to unknown destinations to face an uncertain future (history has a way of repeating itself).

While the most prevalent mode of transportation is no longer railroad boxcars stuffed to the brim with “un-desirables,” buses and planes have become the transportation mode of choice for government officials who do not want “undesirable” people living in their communities. These undesirables are summarily being moved out and dumped into other far-removed cities only to become “the can being kicked down the road” by those washing their hands of any responsibility for their deplorable actions. Many of these hopeful immigrants are now sleeping in the streets of the cities that they have been sent to. So much for jobs, housing and opportunities awaiting them when they were summarily jettisoned to their final destinations.

Our elected officials need to stop using human beings as chess pieces on a cultural chessboard, just to score political points and leverage support from their far-right constituents. The snide, sarcastic public comments made by the governors orchestrating this tragedy do not help the situation one iota, neither are they designed to! Never mind the question of the legality of their actions; the stark, ugly, symbolism of what they are doing serving as a reminder of what mankind has done in the past is horrific!

The Right, Left, Middle, the Congress, the Administration and all governors need to work together to solve our national immigration crisis once and for all. It is time for communication, **collaboration**, and cooperation not criticizing, condemning, complaining, and blaming. Negativity never built a bridge!

Immigration and the unbridled flow of illegal aliens into our country is a huge problem and has remained so for more than two decades! Not one President or Congress has been able to agree on a bipartisan solution to this issue. At the time of the writing of this book, a bipartisan

effort to support a much-needed immigration reform bill has been reached in Congress. Unfortunately, there is currently a concerted movement on the Right, led by a former President, to block the passage of this legislation and to address this problem over a year from now. The reason behind this movement is purely political! The strategy is to do nothing on immigration reform now so that it can be an issue heaped upon the current administration during the 2024 elections. This is a shining example of how we let our politics get in the way of our principles. We make decisions based on maintaining power over maintaining our democracy and the will of the people. This self-serving way of governing must stop!

We desperately need both major parties and independents to work in concert to create a bipartisan immigration bill that will address the problems that we are facing today and will continue to face in the future, as well, if we don't act now. We are America! We can do this if we put our minds to it! ***“Every problem has a solution.”***

Gun Reform Legislation

Another area where collaboration and bipartisanship are desperately needed in our country is Gun Reform.

A recent poll by the University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy and The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research (the poll was conducted between July 28 and Aug. 1, 2023) reveals that 71% of Americans say gun laws should be stricter, including about half of Republicans, a vast plurality of Democrats and a majority of those in gun-owning households.

When we dig a little deeper, we find that a Fox News poll (April 29, 2023) shows that **87%** of voters surveyed said they support requiring criminal background checks for all gun buyers. Other polls indicate that more than 90% of Americans support background checks.

In case you are wondering which country has the greatest gun ownership per capita, you might find the following to be of some interest:

Which country has the most gun ownership per capita?

#	Country	Gun Ownership Rate
1	United States of America	120.5 per 100
2	Yemen (home of the Houthis)	52.8 per 100
3	New Caledonia	42.5 per 100
4	Montenegro	39.1 per 100

More Americans died of gun-related injuries in 2021 than in any other year on record, --- an astounding 20,958 (excluding suicides) according to the latest available statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). That number dipped only slightly in 2022 with a total of gun (non-suicide) deaths amounting to 20,138. When suicides are added to these numbers, the total gun related deaths for each year exceed 40,200!

Shootings continuously make the headlines just seven months into 2023. As of Aug. 1, at least 25,198 people have died from gun violence in the U.S. this year, according to the Gun Violence Archive – which is an average of roughly 118 deaths each day. Of those who died, 879 were teens and 170 were children. The single largest cause of death in our country for those aged 19 and under is gun mortality!

We have more guns in our country than people!

While a large majority of Americans support the somewhat benign concept to implement background checks for gun sales (90%), the perplexing question here is, if 90% of our country support background checks, then why can't we enact legislation from our duly elected members of congress to make that goal a reality? Obviously, the answer is that the pressure brought to bear by the NRA and the Right-Wing Conservative Coalition outweighs the will of the people in our country. The tail is definitely wagging the dog!

Don't we elect our congressmen and women to represent the needs and the will of the people fairly and adequately? Shouldn't they be held accountable if they don't fulfill that obligation? The paradox is ... how do we hold them accountable ... solely by the election process, which doesn't seem to be working?

Our Constitution provides for the "right to bear arms" as a means of allowing us to protect ourselves from the violent encroachment of others ... to protect our homes and families ... to protect our communities and our country from the unwanted, hostile aggression of those who would do us harm. A natural offshoot (no pun intended) of these rights allows us to use our guns for hunting and recreational purposes.

By the way, the context for the passing of the second amendment was to create "A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State" where "*The right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.*" In other words, the second amendment addressed the issue of maintaining the security of "a free state." It was designed to protect our country and ourselves against attack from other countries or outside forces, not to create an avenue for violence in the way of gangs, criminals, suicides, and mass murderers. These were the unforeseen outcome of the second amendment. Our founders and framers certainly did not have this in mind when they created our Bill of Rights in 1791.

In the name of full disclosure, I am a former gun owner. At one time, my arms inventory included a high-velocity pistol (357 magnum), a semi-automatic rifle (Marlyn 35) and a semi-automatic shotgun (Remington – 1100 - 12 gauge - 30-inch barrel), all of which provided me with the challenge and rewards of hunting, the pleasure of recreational shooting and countless hours of camaraderie with my fellow gun enthusiasts and hunters.

I also owned a .22 caliber handgun, which I kept in my home for personal protection only. At no time during my period of gun ownership did I feel threatened that the government, or some outside force, would try to take my firearms away from me. I would like to think that there are a significant number of gun owners today who feel the same way.

What I have witnessed, throughout the years, is a dramatic shift in the reasons behind gun ownership, transitioning from protection, hunting and recreation to extreme aggression and violence. In many of our cities, carrying a gun is a statement of who you are and what you stand for. Guns are more frequently used for the commission of violent crimes, murder, and mass shootings (as the statistics bear out) than ever before. Assault rifles such as AK-47s and AR 15s, with high-capacity magazines, have become the weapons of choice. There is a “kill or be killed” mentality that is growing by the day in this country. **Assault weapons need to be banned entirely!**

Many states are implementing open-carry gun laws without a need for permits. This is a suicidal trend! Violence never begets peace!

Let's put our heads together and collaborate on some commonsense, bipartisan gun laws that do not allow for the unnecessary carrying or brandishing of guns in public. Every gun owner should have the right to own, transport and use their guns at will for hunting and recreation. **It should be illegal to carry or brandish a gun in public unless authorized or licensed to do so.** Anyone carrying a gun in public in Chicago, New York, Los Angeles, or any other city in the U.S., other than for the purpose of hunting or recreational shooting only, should be prosecuted and fined for the offense. The killing of innocent civilians in our country needs to stop ... and it needs to stop now!

Once again, it is time for communication, **collaboration**, and cooperation not criticizing, condemning, complaining, and blaming. It is also time for the people's will to be heard. Let's work together to save our country. It is definitely worth being saved.