

Newsletter 24 August 1, 2024 Bridging the Gap

I think everyone writing newsletters with social and political issues right now is having somewhat of a reawakening. While it seemed that the election gap was growing wider with the attempted assassination working to Donald Trump's advantage, the pendulum seems to be swinging back with Joe Biden stepping aside for Kamala Harris

So, referring to my 17 "lessons in living" for the subject of this tome, as I usually try to do, the obvious one is "compromise", also referred to as "Bridging Divides" in More Perfect's 5 Democracy Goals, or the obligation to "Stay Compromised" in Richard Haass' *Ten Habits of Good Citizens*.

And in addressing this, the goal of course is to ensure that we all understand the issues and focus on electing those who have the competence and integrity to best implement solutions to these challenges. I am an Independent and will vote for Ms. Harris.

It would now appear, although many still disagree, that she has been a lot more active in her first three years as Vice President than she is given credit for. First, regarding the border, she was not appointed "border czar". Rather, she was assigned the task of addressing the root cause of migration in Central America, such as poverty, crime rates and corruption. As Katie Tobin pointed out in her *Wall Street Journal* July 30 article "Kamala Harris Made Progress on the Border Crisis," "Our first task was to clean up Donald Trump's mess. His foreign policy in Central America exacerbated the textbook drivers of migration: poverty, violence and corruption." By stripping U.S. humanitarian and development assistance from Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala in March 2019 "border crossings remained elevated...and without U.S. funding many aid groups in Central America had to close their doors." Ms. Harris immediately "mobilized more than \$300 million in

emergency humanitarian assistance” and actively supported an anticorruption office in Guatemala contrary to the wishes of their then president Alejandro Giammattei. “At her urging, U.S. entities committed over \$5 billion [private capital] from May 2021 to June 2024.” As of June, monthly border crossings by Guatemalans, Hondurans and Salvadoreans had dropped 72% compared to March 2021. In contrast, these groups’ yearly border crossings steadily rose during the Trump administration before Covid.” Recently, migration from Venezuela, Haiti and Cuba has been the problem at the border, and it’s unclear what action Ms. Harris has been pursuing on this or if it’s even part of her charge. Of course, she endorsed the bipartisan border security proposal that was killed by Republicans because Mr. Trump would not put self and party interest aside and let Mr. Biden accept credit for making a significant step in the right direction. Further, over Ms. Harris’s term visiting 20 countries and speaking with 150 world leaders she discussed the conflicts in Ukraine and the middle east, attended three Munich Security Conferences, and met with Mr. Macron to smooth things over after the US agreed to help Australia with their submarine developing efforts thereby negating their previous agreement with France. She visited African nations to reduce Chinese influence, organized meetings with women’s groups in Latin America, Asia and Africa, in short did all the things that VPs are expected to do, but for which they get little credit---perhaps more so because of Mr. Biden’s age and cognitive decline.

On the other hand, Ms. Harris is being roundly criticized, and justifiably so, for extreme progressive positions she has taken on key issues, some of which her campaign is already walking back. It’s hard to know exactly where she is headed on some of these, with the notable exception of her “pro choice” stand on abortion. But I believe she will end up carrying on Mr. Biden’s more moderate agenda.

The candidates aren't going to decide the outcome. The parties aren't. And, as Ronald Reagan would have told us the government isn't. We are.

All of us can actively help our candidate get elected---and here's the challenge for me and my readers---in fact for all voters---how to go about this---compromising as necessary to bridge the gap.

Select at least one friend, colleague or family member who plans to vote for Trump or is undecided, or even a complete stranger in a public place if you're of that mind---if the latter, say that you're conducting a survey for a non government organization, Step Forward America—ask for a few minutes of their time to discuss the upcoming elections—determine if they are undecided or favor Trump --- (if not go onto someone else)—and try to convert them to Kamala. If just 5% of us could convert one person, victory and the White House is ours. This is just as important, if not more so, than making a monetary contribution to her campaign.

All of us should be able to discuss civilly at least some of the issues with which we have disagreement. Hopefully many of you are way ahead of me on this, but here is where I stand, and how I'm trying to sway my opposing friends and colleagues.

Be ready to compromise, set the tone and be prepared to agree with much of what your contact gives as his/her reason for not currently supporting Ms. Harris. There are many positions taken by even the MAGA Republicans with which I am in total agreement. But also select your two or three redlines that are inarguable, and cannot be refuted

For example, here is where I back off with some of my concerns about Trump that are too easy to refute. We all know he is a habitual liar. But so ps Mr. Biden, albeit to a lesser extent. We tend to think of Joe's lies

as “white lies”, exaggerations, lapses, etc., but a lie is a lie. You can’t win that argument.

We all know Mr Trump has no morals nor character, but it’s pretty easy for Joe’s opposition to point to the Democrats’ cover up of Hunter’s laptop and the failure of Joe to stop Hunter from peddling his father’s influence. Agree strongly and move on.

And don’t get too hung up on Biden putting country over self when he agreed to step aside. Yes, he certainly did the right thing eventually, but it had to be forced upon him---hardly voluntary.

Here's a good start to offer compromise on what really concerns those dissatisfied with the current administration.

Cost of groceries and gas---Inflation---**top on the list of voter issues.** I boil this down to a very simple civil discourse. Admit that yes inflation is the original cause of the high cost of groceries, gasoline, etc. still persisting and making it hard for some to make ends meet. And yes , to some degree, debatable how much, this was caused by the heavy increased spending to support Biden’s legislative agenda. But realize that much of this spending went immediately into the pockets of those who now find it hard to make ends meet. As pointed out by Wesley Bignell’s argument in the July issue of *The Nation*, “The pandemic safety net provided cash assistance to families, protected tenants from eviction, supported unemployed workers, expanded food benefits, provided free school lunches, increased Medicaid rolls, paused student loan repayments, and supplied free Covid-19 tests, treatments, and vaccines.... As a result, the number of Americans in poverty fell from 38.3 million in 2019 to 25.6 million in 2021.” Surely this offset a good degree of the negative effects of the over spending.

But perhaps even more significant in this argument, ask why we should blame Biden for the inflation when the rest of the world, at very least the developed world, experienced the same or greater inflation and were not presided over by Biden. Finally ask “what specifically do you think Trump will do to the economy to reduce our cost of groceries? The only thing he’s said on this is that he will apply high tariffs to everything coming in from China which will only increase the cost of goods that we buy. At least Biden has indicated what he is doing or trying to do.

Immigration --- **second voter priority**. The vast majority of us believe that immigrants, first second or umpteenth generation, form the backbone of our country. And don’t forget that asylum seekers legally must be accommodated. But most of us also agree that the situation at the border was complete chaos, at least until recently when it has tapered off somewhat, but probably only temporarily. It’s been this way for decades, increasing worldwide due to the overall increase of migrants---increasing further at our southern border partly because, as a *Wall Street Journal* article in March “Border Crackdowns Won’t Solve the Immigration Crisis” stated, of our insatiable “demand for migrant workers in sectors such as agriculture, slaughtering and meatpacking, construction, cleaning, child and elder-care, hospitality, warehousing, distribution and transport.” It would take a massive increase of legal and clerical help to process asylum seekers and refugees, and a much wider pathway for temporary workers going back and forth across the border to begin to control the flow. With added funding, some progress is being made, and, as mentioned above, more could have been made, if the Republicans had gone along with the Democrats’ reform bill instead of obstructing it to prevent Biden from getting credit. Either raise taxes to pay for it or accept the status quo. If you think the country is now divided on immigration, wait until Trump is

elected and he tries to resolve the issue by mass deportations and internments. As Bret Stephens, a conservative *New York Times* columnist, said in his July 14 article “Republicans Will Regret A Second Trump Term,” “Trump is in the White House and decides to make good on his promise of mass deportation of migrants. Federal Agents are deployed to towns and cities to do the job, but many of them flatly refuse to participate in what feels to them like a modern-day re-enactment of the Fugitive Slave Act. They are joined by Democratic mayors and hundreds of thousands of Americans who are willing to form human chains around homes and neighborhoods to keep the agents out. But Trump doesn’t back down and governors in red states call out the National Guard to break through protests. Many are hurt, some are killed, and riots ensue.”

Build the wall. I don’t like the idea of it, but, if all else fails, it’s hard to argue that it won’t be a deterrent to illegal crossings---good place to compromise.

Third voter priority, crime---all the statistics that I see show violent crime down since Biden’s inauguration and now at its lowest point in more than four decades according to both crime analyst Jeff Asher and the FBI---and immigrants per capita are apparently responsible for less crime than home grows---show me the contrary.

Another good place to come to an agreement, voting rights. I think proof of citizenship should be required. Then again, many born in the US were not born in a hospital and have no birth certificate. Those that are indeed citizens should have a path to vote. Surely a national regulation could be developed to vet these individuals. Sure, a few may slip by---so what?

I look for and focus on a short list of inarguable, red lines if you will, “brute facts” as my high school physics teacher called them.

And these are, as I have indicate previously:

Joe's accomplishment which I will list again:

- American Rescue Plan funding Covid response prevented sudden push into poverty for many
- Bipartisan Safety Communities Act – gun control
- Prescription Drugs price negotiations
- Pact Act veterans compensation for exposure to toxic agent burn pits
- Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act
- Chips and Science Act re semiconductor manufacturing
- Inflation Reduction Act's climate control funding
- The Aukus accord with Australia and the UK

There's no argument here. One may not like some of the accomplishments. But they were/are being accomplished.

It is vitally important that this list is included in any of your discussions. Many prospective voters are unaware of these. A poll referenced in a *New York Times* article on "Selling the Economy" indicated that a third of respondents had never heard of some of these!

And another of my redlines is the fact that the January 6 insurrection would never have happened if Trump hadn't spent the months leading up to it claiming with no evidence whatsoever that the election was stolen, and wouldn't have continued for hours were it not for Trump's dereliction of duty in not demanding a halt. This is sedition regardless of what the Supreme Court may eventually claim when trying to prevent Jack Smith's prosecution.

Sedition might be understood, even acceptable, if occurring in the guise of patriotism to save American democracy, but this sedition was done

for Trump's self-interest only, preventing the transfer of the presidency by claiming a stolen election with no evidence.

And one final brute fact is that Mr. Trump has no moral fitness, no integrity, no character regardless of any ideology he might profess.

His courtroom experiences testify to his lack of morality with his treatment and abuse of women.

And, as for character, those whom he chose to work closest with him, General John Kelly Chief of Staff, General James Mattis Secretary of Defense, General Mark Milley Head of the Joint Chiefs, Chris Christie as debate advisor, Rex Tillerson former head of Exxon Mobil and Secretary of State, Bill Barr Attorney General, as well as his VP Mike Pence have all attested to his lack of character. Yes, his supporters criticize the Biden family, and rightly so, for their influence peddling to make millions in China and Ukraine, but there's no clear evidence, at least not yet, that Joe himself profited. And surely in his inner sanctum, those that know him best with all his warts, as well as the public in general, he's generally considered a pretty decent citizen in the political, community and family arenas.

In closing your discussion, depending on how it goes, you might continua with this comment.

Trump claimed in his rambling acceptance speech that his opponent was the worst president ever, a claim that has not been echoed by many of Mr. Biden's other detractors. And now, we have someone actually charged by respected critics as the worst president in history running again. Four months ago, 154 members of the American Political Science Association, an international highly respected non-partisan think tank/consultancy created a ranking of the greatness of all 45 presidents, and Mr. Trump finished rock bottom at 45th. The top three

in order were Lincoln, FDR, and Washington for obvious reasons. Mr. Biden was well up in the top half at #14. So, it would seem that Ms. Harris has a low bar to hurdle. But, as we all know, when it comes to Mr. Trump's magic, that's not what counts. His followers accept his word as "evidence" and many of the undecideds are not checking the facts.

Finally, voting for a third party or not voting at all has no upside. And if you fail to convince your fellow voters to follow you, ask them if they really want to leave a legacy telling their grandchildren that they voted for a seditionist who broke into the Capitol, our home, their home, and tried to thwart the peaceful transfer of power vital to our democracy. History is not going to turn up any new evidence to the contrary.

Right now it would seem that the biggest issue dividing us to, and if Trump wins through, the election is the combination of the Supreme Court's decision of absolute immunity for the President for any act committed in connection with his official duties---exacerbated by Judge Cannon's lower court decision that the appointment of Jack Smith as special counsel was unconstitutional. As Neal Katyal pointed out in his July 19 *New York Times* opinion piece "The Dismissal of the Trump Documents Case is Deeply Dangerous," Judge Cannon asserts that "no law of Congress authorizes the special counsel....That is palpably false. The special counsel regulations were drafted under specific congressional laws authorizing them." Worst case, Smith's appeal is turned down (unlikely), Trump is elected and is never convicted of sedition, or, if convicted, is self-pardoned. Aggravating, yes, but it doesn't really change what he plans to try do in his term, which will likely replace some civil servants with political appointees loyal to him, and mirror some of the Heritage Foundation's program 2025. He'll accomplish some of this, but many Americans will dedicate themselves

to patriotism, not the kind of patriotism that supported January 6, but “informed patriotism” as Ronald Reagan called it, and by amendment and/or law swing the pendulum back to what the founders envisioned in the Federalist Papers, the Declaration of Independence, and the Constitution with no king, with adequate checks and balances on all three branches of government, and a rule of law applicable to all. How do I know this will happen. I don’t....but it has to---let’s just call it faith in America.

Should Mr. Trump win, I’m not going to spend the next few years in anger and rage. I’ll keep writing, just as all of you will do what you can to support your community and our democracy..

Our founding principles are the heart of what we all like to think of as American exceptionalism. Without them, our exceptionalism will be limited to the world’s highest incarceration rates, most gun deaths, record income inequality, and child poverty. We won’t let this happen.

Socially and economically we have continued to grow and improve throughout the decades of this readership’s lives, but we still have a long way to go to reduce inequality so that everyone working for a living, as well as those marginalized by causes beyond their control can enjoy a satisfactory quality of life and dignity.

Most of us don’t agree with the platforms of the extreme progressives or the extreme MAGA conservatives. But, in judging the lesser of two evils, let’s examine---is their platform based on self-interest or is it based on community interest. The “elites” on the left are generally well off and favor redistribution and regulation. The elites on the right are also generally well off and intend to stay that way. Bernie Sanders in his July 15 *New York Times* article “Joe Biden for President” says “I strongly disagree with the President’s belief that the Affordable Care Act, as useful as it has been, will ever address America’s health care crisis. Our

health care system is broken, dysfunctional and wildly expensive and needs to be replaced with a “Medicare for all” single payer system. Health care is a human right.” Bernie Sanders is not speaking out of self-interest whether we agree with him or not. He’s speaking for those struggling to make ends meet, those “60 percent of Americans [living] paycheck to paycheck” ...”24 percent of seniors [living] each year on \$15,000 or less” the high percent of children living in poverty, all at a time when housing is unaffordable or unavailable. The MAGA platform including lower taxes for the wealthy is simply not aimed in this direction.

Are we for combatting global warming to protect the larger community or do we support the fossil fuel industry for the benefit of corporate America? There’s a mixed bag here with Biden having walked a somewhat tight line and backing down for the sake of compromise regarding some drilling rights, but generally going in the community direction.

The ramble is over. My bridge may be a little wobbly, but I think one can walk across it. In closing---

Regardless of where you stand, if you’re looking for a provoking source of information, questioning both sides of an issue, and you haven’t already done so, listen to or watch Fareed Zakaria. He’s great at conducting interviews and bringing out the best in his guests. Though he’s on CNN Global Public Square Sundays at 10AM and 1PM, if you’re a Conservative, I don’t think you’ll find him too liberal.

But, if you really want to get away from it all, be uplifted and prepare for the coming week’s challenges, turn to your Sunday comic strip and watch “Peanuts---featuring “Good Old Charlie Brown”

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Step Forward America

Ted Hollander