

Considering our declining population, Donald Trump recently floated the idea of granting \$5000 for a new child born in the US. Instead, how about committing to improve the conditions here that discourage bringing another child into this environment where life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness are no longer available to all?

Let me start by looking back just a few months ago to our now departed days of exceptionalism.

Our international reputation, the envy of the world, was built on the ideals expressed in a Constitution that has served us well and benefitted the entire international order for 250 years, fostered by the efforts of American citizens, would be citizens and elected officials to live up to these ideals.

We welcomed the tired, the poor, the struggling, and “huddled masses yearning to be free” and gave them a path to the American dream – work hard, be ambitious, contribute, take responsibility, meet the obligations of citizenship and our bill of rights, and succeed. And succeed they did --- leaders of Fortune 500 companies ---doctors and many other high skilled professionals, millions of small business entrepreneurs, a working class resource that without which our healthcare, agriculture, and construction industries would succumb, and a vital constituency in sports and the visual and performing arts.

Humanitarian aid to the rest of the world is in our genes. We and our European allies were victorious in WWI. We led the defeat of the axis in WWII, and in the aftermath through the Marshall Plan rebuilt Europe and followed up providing the resources to defeat the Soviet Union in the Cold War. We have led and held together NATO, the greatest military alliance of all time. And we have maintained global order, peace and economic stability in the eight decades since the last world war.

Our unparalleled and internationally respected universities have led the way in research and engineering contributing to the advancement of the quality of life here on earth and exploring the nature of the universe beyond.

And all off this has resulted in the strongest economy in the world, the strongest currency and the most trustworthy place in which to invest.

This is all fading away in the wake of President Trump's opening agenda. Not one of these contributions to our exceptionalism is escaping unscathed. Where will we now stand out --- the world leader in the rate of gun deaths --- or maybe as the only major economy committed to abandoning its focus on combatting global warming!

In the guise of efficiently controlling our borders, we have reverted to the ruthless tactics of the autocrats who oppose rights for refugees and asylum seekers fostered by the US and followed by other democracies

Clinging to a misguided perception that we are a country of white Christians, we are reverting to a them versus us relation with our immigrants. Just as we were beginning to perceive some significant progress, primarily due to Donald Trump's influence, in efficiently controlling immigration at the end of the Biden administration --- we implemented new procedures relying on mass deportations and detentions with a notable absence of due process, not only of those with a criminal record, but also of many innocents who have been living, working, and paying taxes here for years if not decades --- some of those deported assigned to cruel and unusual punishment of banishment to a foreign Gulag --- many detainees here on work or study visas.

We have a Congress who are authorized by the Constitution to impose taxes including tariffs, to provide funding for world beneficial scientific health and well-being research by our universally respected universities, and to consent to Presidential cabinet, judicial, and other appointments. But they have deferred these actions to a President who, while required by the Constitution to "take care that the laws be faithfully executed" consistently challenges and frequently skirts these same laws. Congress has done nothing to prevent the President from overturning the laws to protect our clean air and clean water or to combat his policies returning to the use of fossil fuels both for transportation and in lieu of sustainable source for generating electricity --- the same President who in his first days in office has assumed powers far over and above those granted to him by the Constitution --- powers traditionally assumed by autocratic rulers and opposed by democracies--- disregarding the most basic elements of free speech -- - detaining university students for expressing opinions on the war in Gaza contrary to those of the administration --- banning books and combing

publications for content that might relate to diversity, transgender and other social causes opposed by the President

The President who claimed he would end the war in Ukraine on the first day in office, has publicly disrespected Mr. Zelensky and sided with the Mr. Putin, claiming the former as the invader and the latter as the victim in the war. By so doing, he has only accomplished the dissolution of our relations with not only Ukraine but all of our other friends and allies who have had our backs and counted on us to do likewise in times of peril. While telling Mr. Zelensky that Ukraine doesn't have the cards to continue the game, he exposed his own hand by acquiescing to some of Putin's demands before even negotiating --- you can keep Crimea --- Ukraine will never join NATO. What deal is that the art of?

In the guise of protecting ourselves from unfair competition in world trade, we are raising our tariffs on imports from all countries simultaneously hoping to "beggar thy neighbor" but actually raising the costs of goods to consumers worldwide including ourselves. Yes, some countries have taken advantage of us as Trump claims, but all of them cannot have been "ripping us off" when we enjoy the most admired economy in the world. Considering the potential for conflict on three fronts, Ukraine, the Middle East, and Taiwan, never has it been more in our best interests to solidify our alliances and friendly relations not only with our European and southeast Asia allies, but also with our neighbor Canada whose inhabitants no longer wish to avail themselves of our products and tourist attractions not only due to tariffs and other high costs, but also in some cases fear of being halted at the border. Other more serious retaliations that we might expect include China banning shipments to us of rare earths and rare earth magnets used in drones, missiles, fighter aircraft and other strategic military items.

Regardless of the magnitude of the eventual failure or success of our trade war with China and others and our military support or lack of same for Ukraine, in a few short months we have managed to destroy both the respect of the entire world, friends and enemies alike, for our military capabilities, and the trust of the entire world in the strength of our economy.

Not only are we destroying our relations with our friends and allies abroad and next door, but here at home the executive branch is attacking our entire

institutional backbone including government agencies, universities, schools, and legal associations, withholding or threatening to withhold funding, some of it already granted by Congress, based on alleged claims focusing on diversity in their planning and operations.

So many of our great achievements have been through our scientific resources, especially the National Institute of Health with its vast network of thousands of researchers in multiple centers dedicated to treating disease and funding medical research. These and other government agencies providing humanitarian aid are being decimated by DOGE.

Many of us are concerned with the planned dismantling of the U S Agency for Global Media which oversees Voice of America, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and Radio Free Asia which disseminate information to over 3 million foreign listeners anxious for information other than that force fed by their autocratic leaders. On the other hand, if we don't get back on track, we won't have anything to brag about.

A Free Expression column in the April 8 Wall Street Journal expressed it best "America's reputation built on its ideals and burnished over centuries the greatest geopolitical brand ever created. But...we may be witnessing the greatest exercise in brand destruction ever created." Our allies are angry and losing trust, and our enemies are bolstered.

Getting us back on course is a staggering challenge. How do we build back our might as well as our reputation? The quickest way to get started is to mend our relations with our friends and allies. And that starts with Congress and the courts and all our institutions standing up to and reversing the efforts and actions of the President that are responsible for the rapid destruction of these relations, and standing with our allies against unfairly targeted tariffs. Return to unquestioned 100 percent support for Ukraine until Putin offers something that Zelensky, not just us, will accept. Open our shipyards and start building warships on a scale that will justify our boasts that we can keep the high seas open for international trade, and that China will not be able to control the southeast Asia waterways at their will as they could now. David Brooks noted in a New York Times opinion piece that "China's shipbuilding industry has a capacity more than 230 times that of the United States." And "in war games with China, the United States ran out of long-

range anti-ship missiles within three to seven days.” Rather than a capability to address conflicts in Ukraine, the Middle East and Taiwan, we barely have enough weapons and ammunition to support the Ukraine conflict without depleting our reserves. Armed drones are replacing manpower at an increasing rate as a key battlefield component. China manufactures and can export up to 100,000 per month, the US 5 or 6000.

All that said, roughly 40% of us still believe that Mr. Trump is doing a good job. Of the two criteria most considered, cost of living and immigration, they accept Trump’s claim that tariffs somehow will eventually solve the first, and they applaud his success with the second regardless of the means. There is apparently little if any concern with issues related to the decline of our democracy. What can we do? I can only offer the following.

Civics education in primary and secondary schooling, reinforced throughout life by trusted news sources, is the key to maintaining our democracy. Somehow, we must come up with a better way of imbedding in all of us the critical role that the Constitution plays in our daily lives, our social rules, our regulations and laws and thus our voting habits --- perhaps a good analogy is the way the more faithful Christians view the Bible, or the more faithful Muslims the Koran. Keep a copy of the Constitution on hand (readily available at [www.stepforwardamerica.com](http://www.stepforwardamerica.com) ).

Refer to it when you write your elected officials or talk with family, friends and colleagues. At the top of the list in a recent survey of Trump voters regarding their major sources of information was “family and friends and word of mouth”, way ahead of second place Fox News which is the major source for only 7% of the Trump voters.

And it goes without saying --- vote --- vote --- vote --- especially in the mid-terms next year. Remind friends and colleagues. With all the rights and privileges and high standard of living that we enjoy as Americans, one out of every three of our eligible voters doesn’t even vote in Presidential elections, let alone mid-terms.

If you’re not registered and/or don’t want to stay connected to a major party, you can register and stay unaffiliated or register for a minor party that is recognized by your state, for example in Connecticut the Independent Party. Though counterintuitive, being registered unaffiliated or Independent may encourage one to get more involved with issues, perhaps following, if not the leader, one of the

other major players of one of the parties. If you don't like Bernie Sanders, AOC, or Chuck Schumer, for example, listen to Senator Chris Murphy, Illinois Governor J. B. Pritzker or Senator Cory Booker. If you can't overcome the shortcomings of either national party, you don't have to carry their baggage.

Civil discourse is near the top of the list of what Step Forward America advocates. Civil discourse can be infinitely more effective when, as an Independent, one argues in favor of one of the major parties.

Looking ahead to midterms in 2026 and eventually to the 2028 presidential elections, it is quite clear that any inroads the Democratic party may be making are minimal, despite all the opportunities that the Republican party offers. I, like many, have concluded that nothing the Democrats say or do will win over the Trump supporters, or, for that matter, many of the other Republicans who are anti-Trump, but more anti Progressive as represented by today's Democratic party. But the door is wide open for the one out of three eligible voters mentioned above, affiliated or not, that traditionally don't vote. And the lessons of the past eight years or so seem to be slowly sinking in. The loudest, most repetitive voice screaming about the issues that actually most concern the voters, not necessarily the issues that should concern the voters, will capture the vast majority of this group. And these issues of course include the afore mentioned daily cost of living, i.e., groceries, gasoline and energy and healthcare. There are plenty of other issues that Democrat's brag about and justifiably so, such as building factories that provide jobs in the future, and they should be built into a platform available for those undecided voters and should include plenty of specific issues on which the Republicans for the most part would also agree --- major like investing in infrastructure, e.g., automobile factories and chip manufacturing facilities, and controlling the borders but by more organized means, or more minor like no transgenders in women's sports and controlling protests on university campuses that exceed the bounds of free speech and interrupt the lives of those in disagreement. And then, stay away from extreme progressive ideology like DEI per se and other issues that are firmly entrenched, favorably or unfavorably, by most confirmed Democrats and Republican and not expected to change decisively regardless of the campaigns of either party.

And leading the screamers for the Democrats at town halls and rallies should be those already taking the lead, Bernie Sanders, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Illinois Governor JB Pritzker. And other highly positioned Democrats like Senators Murphy and Booker should close the ranks. These are voices that stay on tune, not only in their speech, but also in their unwavering belief in their causes --- some perhaps too progressive for some of us, but all likely to capture the votes of the unaffiliated, Independents and undecideds. Sanders and AOC are already on the stump recently touring the west, Bernie wailing on the wealth inequality in America, AOC citing her working-class background in promoting care and prosperity for those struggling.

We should all attend applicable town halls as well as Hands Off, Act Local and other rallies when and where available. According to a New York Times article “Sanders Draws Crowds with Ocasio-Cortez to Electrify Democrats” “21 percent of those who signed up to attend Mr. Sanders’s events reported that they were Independent, and 8 percent said they were Republicans.”

If we can’t change course, there will no longer be a leader of the free world nor a free world to lead.

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Step Forward America

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