

THE PLEDGE SAYS *INDIVISIBLE*

In Vienna years ago a native Austrian told me that Europeans were waiting for America to collapse. I told him that would require a very long wait. Fast-forward to the present: I still want that answer to hold – but confidence in it no longer seems as strong. Instantly anyone reading that might inquire: "what side am I on"? Well, go figure – my voting history followed circumstance, not party affiliation (against Trump but for McCain instead of Obama, against Clinton, for Bush – then against Bush). As with many of us, our reasons vary, and they're too complex to be summarized in a one-liner or sound-bite.

No attempt is made here to explain or defend my reasons, nor to convince anyone having a different perspective. Rather than a tone of "us-against-them" or "us-against-the-world" this advises a broader scope of attention. Presidents come and go but, after they go, we still have a nation to maintain. Only an even-handed approach can successfully preserve that. Here's an even-handed evaluation of two past presidents from modern times: Republican Nixon and Democrat Clinton both brought severe damage and disgrace to their own office. The nation survived both fiascos. That's possible with widespread willingness to tolerate others' attitudes. Not every choice is clear-cut good-*vs*-evil. Those with opinions deviating from mine don't deserve to be automatically branded as idiots or worse.

Historically that last statement has generally been self-evident; no need to assert it. These days we need to be reminded. Often the reason for opposite opinions can't be explained by *whether* an issue is real-or-imaginary / right-or-wrong / major-or-minor, but by the question of *how* to react to the issue. Problems confronting our decision-makers combine to demand a priority list. Just discussing that risks losing audience left and right, through acknowledging some partial validity of opposing arguments:

- Trade imbalance is real, and some nations have taken advantage of U.S.
 - Provoking a trade war is reckless. Alienating Canada, Mexico and Europe is senseless.
 - Many European countries have not observed their defense obligations.
 - Undermining NATO is irresponsible and self-defeating as well as dangerous.
 - North Korea's nuclear capability came from a despotic regime's inhuman government.
 - Either threatening or befriending a (historically untrustworthy) despot is perilous.
 - If borders are wide open our emergency services will be inundated.
 - The opposite extreme, zero acceptance, flies in the face of our Statue of Liberty.
 - Immigrants without citizenship, green cards, or other permits lack legal permission here.
 - So did our forefathers who not only came here but usurped full control (and had slaves).
 - Today's challenges are amplified by years of past failure to take responsible action.
 - Appearing decisive by accelerated action now can backfire with disastrous consequences.
- This could go on and on, but you get the idea. If any readers still remain at this point, let me identify what prompted me to generate this tract: forced separation of children from parents.

It is especially ludicrous to split those desperate to remain together in an age when so many families separate intentionally. That resonates with me because, over 25 years ago, my son and daughter were moved away from my home – not by government bureaucrats but by their divorce laws. When a stay-at-home mom runs off with another man, the go-to-work dad's financial loss is compounded by the more important loss of his children's company ("shared" custody is a travesty). My story has a happy ending: a beautiful bride and reinforcement of connections temporarily weakened, while able to survive financially through work that interests me. Those being forced apart at our border would need a miracle to be so fortunate.

Looking farther beyond our borders reveals a world of growing hatred against us. Near the beginning of this century our decision-makers, after choosing an aggressor's role in the Middle East and following a battlefield win by deposition of all authority in the vanquished country, left tons of ammunition unguarded. Inevitably a heavy price was paid by the same troops whose sacrifices we (1) take for granted and (2) fail to indemnify as they return and commit suicide at unprecedented rates. Our leaders, at a safe distance away from troops under severe stress, disregarded a senator with POW experience and condoned mistreatment of prisoners – unforgettably stigmatizing the country that produced the best fighting force on this planet.

A sequence of blunders, through irresponsible action and inaction, clears a path for populists who invariably promise solutions via radical change. Alas, the outcome often resembles Orwell's *Animal Farm* scenario: those taking charge by good-deal-for-all assurances morph into oligarchs, proclaiming "some are more equal than others." We learn from history only occasionally. Poland's determined resistance in the 1980s prompted this explanation from George Will why Russian leaders were worried: because workers of the world might unite. More recently our cavalcade of stumbles and floundering has generated wanna-be leaders who would erase boundaries and guarantee uniformity throughout (the resemblance is unmistakable *from each according to his abilities and to each according to his needs*). The real world won't work like a monastery. Yes, transition will continue (it always has and always will; "change is the one constant") but, if it's too fast to allow adaptation, chaos ensues.

There's no shortage of proposed answers but only the practical ones steer between extremes of permanent status quo *vs* revolution-now. Since most of us realize that, we need to refrain from brinksmanship. Demonizing our countrymen has begun to create talk about civil war, courting disaster. That's insane; wanna see how far down that is? Consider examples within memory, of breakdown after generations of apparent peace (Ireland; the former Yugoslavia; countless tribal conflicts in Africa; Syria). Our international adversaries work hard to make that happen in the U.S. Keep communication open. Let's not help our worst enemies.

Let's not be like Nero either. Our country is at risk. Some of us are stretched to the limit (with no time for any addition) but not all are among those. If we're not, we might want to consider how we spend our time. Everyone needs downtime, but our entertainment industry is running at full speed. If fun and games are more than a diversion, it's worth asking what could replace some of the leisure activity. The answer is different for each individual.