

## Commentary... Of a certain age...

By Sue Stafford  
Columnist

Since November 8, millions of words have been written and spoken by those who are either elated or appalled with the election of Donald Trump as our 45th president.

Never in my lifetime do I remember witnessing a presidential campaign so focused on personality flaws rather than policy. The negative campaign ads, disrespectful rhetoric, character assassinations, and unchallenged lies, created an unparalleled low in the history of American politics.

There have been other nasty campaigns full of dirty tricks. In 1876 Rutherford B. Hayes defeated Samuel Tilden when actual votes were changed in the post-reconstruction South. In the 19th century contest between Thomas Jefferson and John Adams, both sides slung vicious personal slurs at one another.

The difference with the just-completed election is that it ran counter to all our values as a nation. Any sense of civility was crushed, respect

was nonexistent, lying was normalized and reported as news.

In order to work, democracy relies on certain codes of conduct and a respect for the process. The conduct and respect have been waning for some time in the houses of Congress as well as on Main Street, but both were nonexistent in this past national election.

Campaign rallies became shouting matches accompanied by physical violence. Campaign speeches filled with vile bigotry and xenophobic taunts replaced rational dialog about proposed policies and programs for the benefit of the country.

And now we are witnessing increased open bullying and harassment of anyone who is "different" in our public schools. Students are mimicking what they have seen in the media and heard in their own homes – even here in Central Oregon. Peaceful protests are being hijacked by anarchists, whose only goal is to create violent mayhem and upheaval in our cities.

This country survived secession and a Civil War and was able to reunite when it was over, despite the fact

that countrymen had been killing each other. In my 72 years, I have witnessed the civil rights movement, Watergate, anti-Vietnam War protests, the feminist movement, assassinations of important political and cultural figures, the Cuban missile crisis and any number of smaller bumps in the road. I never feared for the survival of our democracy or the concept of our welcoming and supporting the oppressed and downtrodden.

Following these past 18 months of a campaign based on negativity and employing fear-mongering, character assassination, intolerance, dishonesty, and incivility, I am left stunned and wondering if this ideological chasm between outsiders and insiders, the elite and those who are losing their grip on the American dream, the nativists and the pro-immigration supporters, the populists and the establishment has become too wide and deep to be bridged.

What I won't personally do is accept as the new normal what just transpired during the national election. I can't just make nice and pretend all those terrible things weren't said and done.

Instead, I will follow the admonition of President Obama, who said, "Each of us has the power to choose our path." He urged us to stay engaged and educate ourselves. I may have no ability to effect change on a national level, but I can channel my shock, disappointment, and fear into being involved in a positive way in addressing issues that face us here in Sisters and Central Oregon.

I can stand up for someone who is being bullied or threatened. I can interact with my neighbors with kindness, respect, honesty, and a spirit of collaboration. I can listen

and invite meaningful dialog. I can name bigotry when I hear or see it. And I can continue to vote.

I will work to mend the part of the world that is within my reach. An accumulation of my acts of goodwill – my efforts – plus your efforts and the efforts of others can work together for good.

Please don't either throw up your hands in surrender or act out in anger and frustration. Let's use this as a wake-up call to re-establish the values and priorities that really can make America great again for everyone. Don't let hatred win.

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