

KEIZERTIMES PUBLIC SQUARE

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A trillion here, a trillion there

By LYNDON ZAITZ

A trillion dollars here, a trillion dollars there, soon it all adds up to real money. The game of chicken being played out in Washington over the debt ceiling and a massive infrastructure bill will have to come to an end somehow. Some say if the debt ceiling is not raised the country is in for major economic pain—a recession, lost jobs and downgrading of the nation's credit rating.

We elect leaders and representatives to maintain the United States. The steps to achieve our national goals is our politics. Spend more? Spend less? Allocate more resources for social needs? Who's vision should be enacted? Progressives want to spend trillions of dollars to make the country more equitable.

The national debt now stands at more than \$28 trillion dollars. In 2000 it was \$5.6 trillion dollars—that seems like such a quaint amount now. Did America have a choice? The attacks of Sept. 11 and subsequent homeland security expenses coupled with the Great Recession of 2008 and the COVID pandemic caused the federal budget to balloon, adding trillions of dollars a year to the debt.

President Biden is working hard to get his \$3.5 trillion spending plan approved. He is not only facing opposition from Republicans. With razor thin margins in both the U.S. House and the Senate, the President cannot afford to lose one single vote.

The president has met with two Democratic senators who will not vote for the \$3.5 trillion plan. One can only imagine



conversations between those senators and the President. What concessions are demanded or offered to secure those necessary votes?

We've been here before in negotiations over the raising of the debt ceiling. Every time, those who oppose it get something in return for their support. It is always a game of political chicken. This go-round, some smell blood in the water, and feel they can be victorious, get what they want and position themselves to win big in the mid-term elections next year.

A national debt of \$5 trillion is manageable and with fiscal responsibility payments on the debt can be slowly paid down. A \$30 trillion debt is different and we are at a point where we could all suffer economic pain.

Spending \$3.5 trillion the government doesn't have will not endear the President or Congress to the people. Only maintaining the country and safeguarding our economy will do that. Can't we get by with \$1.5 trillion? A trillion here, a trillion there adds up to real money. Stop playing political chicken and don't mortgage the future of our grandchildren and their children for a short-term gain.

(Lyndon Zaitz is publisher of the Keizertimes.)

Democracy vs. autocracy

By GENE H. McINTYRE

Born in Astoria, Oreg., my forebearers preceded me there from Finland and Scotland. All my adult life I've viewed myself fortunate because I have enjoyed the freedoms and privileges of an American citizen. Meanwhile, I have lived long enough to retire into a life that would have been admired by family members who perished before my arrival.

Further, I owe a debt of gratitude to my solid citizen, hard-working parents who established and maintained a safe and healthy home for my sisters and me. Then, too, is the gratitude due those generations of Americans who founded our country and kept it going, affording the people here with all that made the U.S. great while most toiled away at the experiment in democracy that has survived, sometimes just barely, through the nation's 245 years of history.

It would seem by daily news that there are an ever-enlarging number of Americans, some born here like me, others immigrants, who desire a change away from our way of life to conditions and practices that suggest those of an autocracy where one person takes the reins of power and all citizens under that person become his or her followers. So, what are some contrasting features between the form of democracy we've practiced and an autocracy?

Autocracies typically concentrate the power of government in one person where virtually all decision-making is in the



hands of that one person with little to no input from other members. In other words, autocratic leaders make choices based on their own ideas and judgments and avoid advice from their followers. Followers are not trusted, only controlled. Force, manipulation and coercion achieve leader objectives. An advantage of an autocracy is that decisions can be made quickly and efficiently with no waste of time consulting with other people or reviewing proposed actions. However, in this age of technological and sociological complexities, one-person rule can be dangerous by omissions as it is highly difficult for one person to know everything while all followers are in mute mode.

There remains at present here in America, time to debate this subject with citizen involvement. Examples of other nations gone autocratic, the switch has often been explosive, violent and forced with compliance ultimately demanded, not duly accepted. Americans can tolerate and allow a change or be driven to it, there's still opportunity for input here.

(Gene H. McIntyre lives in Keizer.)

Political violence

By MICHAEL GERSON

American politics—as some dissident Republicans and state election officials will tell you—is already conducted in the shadow of violence.

The threat of violence was always a subtext of Trumpism, usually involving the encouragement of assault against hostile protesters or the refusal to clearly repudiate brutality by Trump supporters. This could sometimes be dismissed as barroom bravado. But we entered a new phase when former president Donald Trump explicitly sided with the political violence of Jan. 6 and declared that our current government is illegitimate.

The baseless claim of electoral fraud, in particular, has acted as an accelerant to anger. Trump consistently claims that something—power, respect or social dominance—has been stolen from his supporters and that only “strength” will reclaim it. The consequences of failure, Trump declares, would be apocalyptic: the loss of America itself. “If you don't fight like hell,” he said before the events of Jan. 6, “you're not going to have a country anymore.” This is the cultivation of desperation.

It is little wonder that about two-fifths of Republicans (in a poll this year) expressed an openness to political violence under certain circumstances. People in this group are not being stigmatized. They have the effective endorsement of a former president and likely GOP presidential nominee in 2024.

This line of argument is dangerously congruent with one view of the Second Amendment on the right that long preceded Trump—a belief that the ownership of guns is the last resort in the defense of liberty. This acts as constitutional permission for the use of force against fellow citizens.

It's difficult to game out what this means for the future. Would some on the hard left respond in kind, as a stigmatized few are already doing? This reaction is not in any way equivalent to what we've seen on the right, mainly because the political party of the left remains committed to liberal democracy. But I suspect a marginally thicker slice of the left would be inclined to “punch a Nazi” during a second Trump term. And it doesn't require many bad actors to cause a violent confrontation.

At the least, these trends threaten to turn any national trauma or trial—a disputed election, an unjust police shooting, a resented judicial ruling, a bitter political convention—into an occasion for violence. And a great many elections lost by Republicans will be disputed, given the GOP's philosophic embrace of unconstitutional bad-loserism.

I suspect that a second term for Trump would accelerate all these trends. In Trump's first term, federal law enforcement officers were given license to rough



up peaceful protesters (as in Lafayette Square). Trump used violent supporters to threaten and intimidate members of Congress (and his own vice president). High-ranking military officials feared Trump might try to use the armed forces for unconstitutional purposes. Is there any doubt that Trump, empowered by reelection and accustomed to the use of power, would use times of crisis—particularly civil disorder—as justifications for broader violence?

The most important response to these unnerving trends is political mobilization to prevent Republicans from taking control of the House, Senate and presidency. But it is possible, in the natural rhythms of politics, for an unfit party to take control. So it is premature, but not irrational, to ask: What might opposition to an illiberal Trump regime look like?

A Democratic friend provides this answer: “Only an organized and ongoing mass nonviolent protest and resistance movement would be the needed counterweight.”

The advantages of this approach are the same that the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. defined in *Stride Toward Freedom*, his account of the Montgomery bus boycott. King argued that nonviolence allows people to fight evil without resorting to violence; allows for opposition without dehumanization; aims at understanding an opponent rather than humiliating them; and prevents the resister from being deformed by hate.

Nonviolence is sometimes criticized on the left as passivity or compliance. That strikes me as entirely inconsistent with the civil rights movement in practice. King argued that an active but nonviolent resistance is not merely possible; it is the only strategy that preserves the possibility of future unity.

The more apt question would be: Who has the cultural standing to lead and train such a movement? It may be someone from the Black church -- or the White church, for that matter. I doubt such leadership will emerge from politics. In our society it could come from anywhere: sports, entertainment, literature, music. We are left to hope that someone feels the call.

“Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that,” King said. “Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that. The beauty of nonviolence is that in its own way and in its own time it seeks to break the chain reaction of evil.”

(Washington Post)

KEIZERTimes

WHEATLAND PUBLISHING CORP.
142 Chemawa Road N, Keizer, Oregon 97303
Phone: 503.390.1051 • www.keizertimes.com



**PUBLISHER
& EDITOR**

Lyndon Zaitz
publisher@keizertimes.com

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NEW DIGITAL
SUBSCRIPTION PRICING:
\$5 per month, \$60 per year

YEARLY PRINT
SUBSCRIPTION PRICING:
\$35 inside Marion County
\$43 outside Marion County
\$55 outside Oregon

Periodical postage paid at Salem, Oregon

PUBLISHED
EVERY FRIDAY
Publication No: USPS 679-430

POSTMASTER
Send address changes to:
Keizertimes Circulation
142 Chemawa Road N.
Keizer, OR 97303