A nonpartisan path forward for America



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The White House was lit with the colors of the American flag on July 29, 2024, in Washington, D.C. Contributing columnist William McKenzie writes about a new, nonpartisan way forward to help the country rise out of the political muck.

A vision our elected officials need to consider

If you don't like the tone and direction of our politics — and I don't — then you need to come up with an alternative to the bullying and threats on one side and identity politics and class warfare on the other. So I'm putting my money where my mouth is.

This is not a partisan call to arms. Rather, it's the outline of a vision for us as Americans to start requiring of our elected representatives. Change will start when we the people demand a different tone and direction.

Here are a few pillars for a new vision.

Embrace grace over rage

Historian Jon Meacham made the point in *American Lion*, his Pulitzer-winning biography of Andrew Jackson, that America vacillates between grace and rage. Clearly, we are in a period of rage. So, how do we get back to a place of grace, where we don't treat those who disagree with us as enemies?

We can start by joining the reconciling work being done in communities far away from the arm-wrestling of the national debate. Across the nation, organizations and individuals fight addiction, find opportunities for the homeless and supply food for those whose salaries leave them short each month. In our hometowns, "points of light" quietly practice compassion while others on public stages prefer to promote a politics of anger, identity and resentment.

This work also involves listening. Reconciling leaders maintain their differences without declaring a holy war on each other. In short, these local citizens and leaders "practice pluralism" in their communities. I'm thinking here of leaders like mayors Mattie Parker in Fort Worth and David Holt in Oklahoma City.

These models show us how to enter an age of grace. The extremes will consider this folly. But we don't have to rage all the time.

Forego the politics of retribution

This point will make plenty of people mad, but we need to revisit the Gerald Ford legacy. There was a strong case that justice required prosecuting Richard Nixon after his departure. But his successor chose mercy — for the good of the country. In pardoning his predecessor, Ford knew we needed to heal and move forward.

We should ask the same of those who will eagerly want to prosecute President Donald Trump and his inner circle, or those who want to seek revenge on Democrats for previous prosecutions of Trump. Turning the other cheek will cost partisans support from their bases. But unless there is some egregious violation of the Constitution or the law which threatens safety or sovereignty, let us move on so we can think ahead.

Educate our way forward

For those of us who believe in the benefits of a flow of goods, services and ideas across borders, we need to acknowledge the global marketplace hasn't allowed all people and communities to prosper, at least not sufficiently. Nor does a nation move ahead when poverty robs people of opportunities.

A big part of the solution requires a keen focus on improving public schools. Boys that are not keeping pace with what the world will demand of them especially deserve attention.

This challenge requires using scientific research to guide classroom practices, providing instruction that has proven to elevate reading proficiency and comprehension, rewarding teachers for helping students master their subjects, ensuring school districts and campuses provide necessary interventions, supplying enough counselors to guide high school students into postsecondary opportunities, and employing tested strategies that improve the achievement levels of English-language learners and students with learning differences and disabilities

We also need to focus on the technical skills that some parts of our economy require. A good example is Dallas ISD's career institutes that train high school students for jobs in fields like cybersecurity, construction and patient care.

Champion science

Just as scientific research should guide our education policies, so should peer-reviewed literature shape our approaches to combating droughts, controlling wildfires and preserving water supplies. The same goes for challenges emanating from a changing climate.

At the same time, science should guide our health policies, including vaccination schedules. Evidence should inform our decisions, just as research should inform medical and technological innovations that improve lives.

Practice fiscal responsibility

As part of a commitment to a thriving marketplace, we must face an unenviable reality: The $38 trillion federal debt must be addressed so that it doesn't strangle future growth.

The Treasury Department reports our federal debt in 2025 equals 125% of GDP. The debt is greater than the sum of our economy, which impacts our ability to pay down that debt. The less the economy grows, the fewer dollars available to pay back our borrowings.

An expanding debt also pressures interest rates and risks crowding out investment capital that otherwise would spur economic growth. Even worse, an unchecked debt could spawn a fiscal crisis that leads to sharp tax hikes and spending cuts. That would deliver yet another uppercut to working Americans who feel the economy is pummeling them.

We are not in a debt-driven fiscal crisis — yet. And we can't undo our excesses in one action. But Congress needs to start working on them now, including putting entitlement programs like Social Security on firmer fiscal ground. Its finances are headed toward insolvency in seven years, the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget's Maya MacGuineas warned recently in these pages.

Tap into the private sector

Another answer to those who feel the economy isn't working for them is to keep entrepreneurs innovating and creating jobs. Enterprising individuals and companies prize certainty. They need to know that the government will neither regulate with too heavy a hand nor let some get away with gaming the system, including juicing up the tax code with perks.

Come to think of it, simplifying the tax code could go far in creating greater certainty. That could grow more jobs, too.

Promote religious pluralism, not religious nationalism

We need a dedication to religious pluralism so that believers of any stripe, but particularly followers of the three major Abrahamic faiths, can discuss their differences respectfully without resorting to demonization or, worse, violence.

Religious pluralism stands as a counter to the extremism that religious supremacy of any kind can spawn. America has benefited from religious practices and values that strengthen our communities while wisely eschewing the embrace of any one faith. We should continue that tradition.

Show compassion and support democracy

Some may be tempted to isolate from the world, especially in such a turbulent period. But we can't afford to withdraw. Dissidents standing up to authoritarian leaders around the world depend upon us to champion personal, political and religious freedoms. Journalists fighting for a free press in their countries look to the United States to embrace an independent press. Families suffering malnutrition and disease turn toward America for aid and assistance.

Our standing in the world is ultimately moral, not militaristic, material or transactional. Our moral standing starts at home, too: How do we treat the least of these? Do we show each other respect? Are we practicing compassion, which means standing with those who suffer?

When we abide by those values at home, we lead with authority. We also counter the malevolent foreign leaders who gladly would fill any vacuum created by an inward America.

Look, I get that things are troubling. I read and see the same things you do. But we can do better. Here's the beginning of one path forward.

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Political mess is all of ours to own

Voters selected conflict, not governance, and both parties made that choice possible



RONELL SMITH

Having grown up in a small rural farming community, I learned early in life that people don't simply disagree on what they see; they disagree on what matters. On a farm, for example, one person sees order, productivity, the rhythm of seasons. Another sees what's underneath: the slaughter, the debt the labor that never ends. Both are real.

That distinction helps explain this political moment.

"You voted for this," I hear often, including last week from an exasperated friend who lives in Argyle. She's raising two kids soon to enter college and trying to make sense of a U.S. president whose governing style looks chaotic at best and reckless at worst. Before I could get a word in, she rattled off a litany of concerns, including the conflict in Iran, the latest federal government shutdown, gas prices, frozen hiring markets and friends' children who can't find jobs or afford homes.

Then she asked a reasonable question: How can anyone be OK with this?

Voters knew what they were getting in Donald Trump. The voters who supported him weren't looking for a manager; they elected a weapon. They wanted someone who would close the border or appear willing to do so at any cost. Someone who would dismantle DEI programs in government and corporate America. They were not selecting for stability, competence or consistency; they were choosing the person who'd definitely act on the issues they cared about most. The rest was the cost of the ticket.

The mocking of liberals on Truth Social. The celebration of former FBI director and special counsel Robert Mueller's death. A governing style that treats every institution as an adversary. His supporters saw those things clearly and priced them in.

But Democrats built the permission structure that made that tolerance possible. For years, they governed in ways that signaled indifference — or open hostility — to concerns that millions of voters considered urgent. An immigration policy that allowed millions of undocumented immigrants into the country while the party called enforcement immoral. An identity-focused agenda that filtered nearly every policy question through the lens of race or gender.

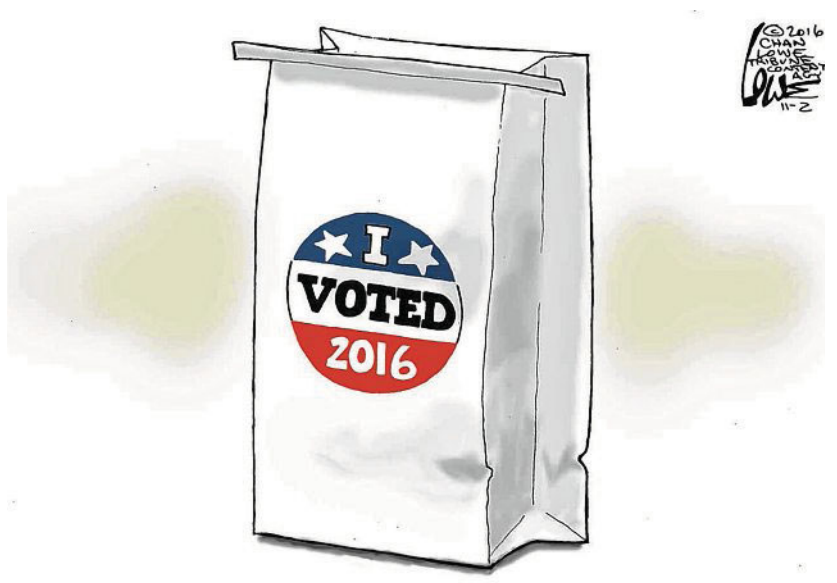
And when prices crushed household budgets, both President Joe Biden — who declared the economy "strong as hell" while inflation topped 8% — and Vice President Kamala Harris were nonchalant about the pain.

Then, against that backdrop, Democrats installed Harris as their nominee, despite doubts within the party about whether she was electable or presidential. Even as a bruised, angry, repeatedly prosecuted Trump promised to exact revenge against his adversaries if re-elected, his voters' minds were long ago made up.

This, as I told my friend, is why we're reaping what we sowed. We are watching the consequences of what we chose to reward. This mess is all of ours to own.

Until what we reward change, we'll get more of the same.

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Chan Lowe

Voting, and its results, have become a stomach-turning exercise the last few election cycles. We've brought this on ourselves, writes contributing columnist Ronell Smith.