

What Values Would You Like to See Reflected in Our Social & Political Discourse?

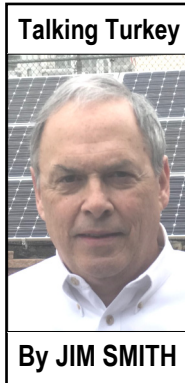
Like many of you, I have stood by among scientists on topics like global warming was considered enough to consider it “settled science.”

in dismay, watching the decline of civility and the rise of extremism in American society over the past few years.

There was a time — very recently, in fact — when politicians spoke respectfully of their political opponents, when they didn't assign them crude nicknames, and when they weren't outright mean to each other.

There was a time when the anchor of the CBS Evening News, Walter Cronkite, was “the most trusted man in America” and factual reporting of events was respected and not discarded as “fake” or “partisan” news.

There was a time when 99% agreement (actually, less than that)



Americans fooled themselves after the election of Barack Obama into thinking we had entered a “post-racial” era, but now we realize racism will never die. Instead there are times when it's not considered appropriate to voice those impulses or put them into action.

The election of Donald Trump was different. Seeing and hearing the President of the United States mirror one's own thoughts emboldens him or her to express them or perhaps take to the streets with them, as we saw in the 2017 “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville. Thus emboldened, they often go further than the President, such as when the demonstrators chanted, “Jews Will Not Replace Us!” Making matters worse afterwards was when the President said there were “very fine people” among those demonstrators.

What brought this topic to mind for this inaugural edition of this column was a segment on last week's Bachelor program on ABC, “The Women Tell All,” in which Rachel Lindsay described the hate and death threats which she endured as an African-American celebrity when she was the “Bachelorette.” The black women who were contestants in this season's Bachelor program nodded their heads in acknowledgement of experiencing similar hatred.

That's what has been so destructive of the current presidency — the emboldening of racists, white nationalists and others who in years past would have kept those thoughts to themselves and their loved ones, and certainly not acted on them as they so freely do nowadays.

But there's more. The President's baseless demeaning of the mainstream media, abetted shamelessly by Fox News, has not been fatal — the press will survive and thrive after this president is gone — but it has contributed to the emboldening referred to above.

The most serious long-term effect of this presidency, however, will be the four-year hiatus in the national effort to address climate change. This is a president who has given voice to that 1% of climate scientists who are blind to this worldwide threat at a time when action is so critical. Fortunately, cities, states and corporations have understood the threat and are, to an extent, taking up the battle without the White House support they should be receiving. Let's hope it's enough.

From the beginning, most Americans recognized Donald Trump as a narcissist and pathological liar, someone who returned love only for those who loved or pretended to love him through flattery, such as smart ex-KGB officers like Vladimir Putin.

What's most surprising to me is not just the self-serving Republican enablers who have tied their wagon to Trump's star, but how many day-to-day Americans see in Trump's personality something to admire.

This twice-monthly column will be posted at www.JimSmithBlog.com. You can subscribe to that blog.