

It's Hard to Be an Optimist About the Future of Our Country, Isn't It?

First of all, I realize this column is appearing on Thanksgiving Day. New readers need to know that "Talking Turkey" is not a food column. The name originated when I ran for mayor of New York in 1981 against Ed Koch and published a campaign newspaper by the same name.

In this week's "Real Estate Today" column, I wrote about what I'm thankful for. I didn't mention, as I could have, that I'm thankful (indeed, blessed) to have been born in America, which, for most of my life, has been a beacon of democracy. Unfortunately, that beacon is fading, as recently documented by International IDEA (www.idea.int) in a report on "The Global State of Democracy" which put it this way: "The United States, the bastion of global democracy, fell victim to authoritarian tendencies itself, and was knocked down a significant number of steps on the democratic scale." I have posted a link to this report at www.JimSmithBlog.com.

Unfortunately, because the rest of the world has always looked to the United States as model, we have witnessed anti-democratic forces emboldened worldwide during the Trump administration. This is similar to how Donald Trump himself emboldened alt-right and white supremacist organizations to come out from the shadows, most notably in Charlottesville's "Unite the Right" rally.

Remember how Michelle Obama was lambasted following her husband's election in 2008 when she said, "For the first time in my adult life, I'm really proud of my country." She, as a black woman, had good reason to make that statement, but right wingers were happy to use it against her.

Well, for the first time as an adult, I can say that I am no longer proud of my country. It may have survived the attempted coup of January 6th, but the ground work

is being laid to "elect" Donald Trump or some other fascist wannabe in 2024 regardless of the popular or Electoral College vote.

That's right. Maybe you have heard about the John Eastman memo which laid out how Republican-controlled legislatures could, *in accordance with the Constitution*, declare their popular votes for president invalid and send their own slate of electors to Congress for approval. Failing that, the Constitution allows for the presidential vote to be thrown to the House of Representatives if the Electoral College fails to produce a decisive vote as a result of those contested slates of electors. Each state gets one vote, regardless of population, and there are 25 states with a majority Republican delegation, *possibly more after the 2022 mid-terms*, to cast their one vote for the Republican.

The recipe for overturning a presidential election failed in 2020 only because it was conceived too late — no Republican controlled state had acted in time to send a competing slate of Trump electors to the Electoral College. That recipe *could*, however, work for the 2024 election, so the groundwork is being laid now.

Aggressive gerrymandering by those Republican-controlled legislatures is part of that groundwork. Currently, 32 state senates are controlled by Republicans, compared to 18 by Democrats. The breakdown in state houses is similar: 29 to 19, with one state, Alaska, sharing power. (The total is 49, because Nebraska has only a senate, not a house.)

We are truly in a downward spiral toward a takeover of our country by followers of Donald Trump. This could spell the end of *The American Experiment* — the title of a recent best-seller by David M. Rubenstein, which I am now reading and heartily recommend.

Republicans have learned that they

can't win an election in which voting is facilitated in multiple ways, including mail-in voting. They know that's what turned Colorado blue. So their strategy is to restrict easy access to the ballot.

As an anti-Trumper, I took heart in the fact that the former president, at his best, never exceeded the low-40s approval rating Joe Biden has right now. The majority of Americans disapproved of him and it showed when Trump was voted out in 2020.

The way things are heading, however, it will no longer matter who gets the most votes.

This downward spiral toward right-wing, anti-democratic control of our government should concern every citizen who loves democracy and respects the rule of law.

By now we should all know the hypocrisy of Donald Trump's labeling the mainstream media "fake news" and "the enemy of the people." The real purveyors of fake news are *their* media outlets, and the #1 "enemy of the people" nowadays is Tucker Carlson, closely followed by Sean Hannity and Laura Ingraham.

The right-wing takeover of our country began in earnest when Donald Trump was elected and wholesale nomination and confirmation of arch-conservative federal judges was undertaken by Trump and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell. I use the word "wholesale" on purpose. The nominees, all but eight with connections to the right-wing Federalist Society, were so numerous that they were bundled in Senate voting, not voted on individually. Several of those judges received "not qualified" ratings by the American Bar Association, but that didn't matter. They passed the Federalist Society's litmus tests for conservative opinions. On my blog, I have posted a link to a May 2020 New York Times analysis of Trump's appointees — very revealing in its detail. By that date, a quarter of the judges on the appel-

late bench (last stop before cases go to the Supreme Court), were Trump appointees. Their political background was key to their nomination by Trump.

Yes, the conservative shift in the Supreme Court is worrisome to liberals like myself, but the shift in the lower courts is just as worrisome. We are seeing gun rights expanded and abortion rights restricted. Voting rights are being severely restricted in Republican-controlled states, but there's little hope that they will be invalidated by the courts.

Not surprisingly, Republicans are unapologetic about these developments. It's not the party of my Republican parents, or probably yours.

Equally disturbing is the way in which our Democratic president is going against his own values for political reasons. As a Democrat, I'm confident that he would like to promote the New Green Deal, Medicare-for-All, and other issues voiced primarily by Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and the other members of "The Squad." But he can't afford to be in the crosshairs of the right-wing, given its huge cable TV, talk-radio, and other megaphones.

All these developments have eaten away at my past optimism about continued forward movement on policies and issues which are important to me.

Moreover, I'm not satisfied with how competent the Democrats and President Biden in particular are at countering the lies and distortions of the right wing. I admired Pete Buttigieg for his regular appearance on Fox News, including at least one Town Hall-type broadcast. I think both Joe Biden and Kamala Harris should offer themselves up to Fox News for a town hall broadcast. There's no other way that the Fox News audience will hear a response to the lies and distortions they hear from both the news side of that network and from their evening fear-mongers.

Happy Thanksgiving!

Talking Turkey



By Jim Smith