

Chapter 07

Rambling thoughts

Maintaining a focus on the consequential matters that need attention in our society is often difficult because of incessant media rants that cloud the political landscape. The end result is a lack of attention, or at most an occasional cursory mention paid to what really needs to be discussed.

While the Constitution is a simple document, uncomplicated document, we have an overly complicated central government guided by millions upon millions of pages of legislation, and operated by millions of federal and contract employees. The ship of state is top heavy with federal regulations - many of which are at odds with the wishes and best interests of the population and obstructive of business productivity. Recently, the country had been embattled by a chief executive who commandeered control of federal legislation without significant opposition from a stultified elected legislature. The country is sinking under its own weight and is off course. And, the population is split into two camps, one ranting about the corruption of founding principles and the other demanding more authority to the central government.

An image that I find analogous to our country's condition is that of a World War Two warship that is badly damaged from enemy action, and is listing and needs to be brought back to an even keel to prevent it from capsizing. During the many naval encounters in the Second World War, United States Navy crews were required to execute monumental damage control while in the midst of battle, not only to save the ship but enable it to continue fighting, sometimes after incurring deaths and injuries, losing partial engine power, having to redirect steering from

a blown apart bridge to below decks, and even losing several guns. The United States Navy training doctrine was developed over many decades, and in spite of the dire need for new ships at the outbreak of World War Two, before a ship was sent into action, crews were extensively trained in damage control, as the Navy understood that ships would be damaged in battle, and that with proper damage control, ships that otherwise would be lost could be saved and remain in the fight. They accepted damage and the need to control it as an integral part of naval action.

Today's two major political parties seem unwilling to repair the damage that has been done to our country over the past fifty or so years, but rather they are determined to add additional stress to the already burdened system – denying the seriousness of the situation. Along with many others, I fear where this will lead, and even if the ship of state can be put on an even keel and survive.

The Shell Game

We continually hear that some project, or venture, or trip by an elected official or bureaucrat, or some program, or new legislation, or gift of foreign aid is only this or that many thousands, or hundreds of thousands, or millions, or billions of dollars, and eliminating such and such particular expense would do little to reduce the yearly national budget deficit and the resultant debt. I for one would like to see all unnecessary expenses eliminated and all bloated spending reduced at every opportunity. I am willing to see the government begin its exercise in frugality sooner, rather than later or never.

Former President Obama is being blamed for unnecessarily and frivolously spending millions of dollars on anything for which he could write a check; and that after eight years he doubled the national debt. It is factual to say that he has illegally written checks for some several billion dollars, using money from funds allocated for purposes other than those for which they were used - none of which

was contested by Congress. Still, from a larger point of view, It would appear that we have forgotten that it is the Federal Congress that allocates the money that can be spent. In June of 2015, the Congress, with a newly gained Republican majority in both houses, approved another continuing resolution that included funding for the Affordable Care Act, rather than cutting off funding for most of its programs as they promised during the previous election cycle. Later on, once Paul Ryan took over as the new Speaker, after severely criticizing the President about his executive action on immigration, the House passed another continuing budget resolution giving the President all the money he wanted to fund his order. The Congress, in a gesture of good will, has cut its own operating expenses back to "only" four billion dollars. Still, the size of the Executive branch has grown.

With each new President, the Office has become more expansive. We now shuttle the President around in planes that are extremely expensive to operate, for what can only be described as personal political appearances, justified by some unnecessary Presidential speech. Some trips by President Obama, admittedly just golfing vacations, cost as much as four million dollars.

When I look at our Presidents arriving in their jumbo jets, all prim and cheerful while "Rome burns", giving some unnecessary speech somewhere, costing a few million, it makes me think that maybe it would be better if the President put on a pair of jeans, rolled up his sleeves and toured every department in the Federal Government, studied every dollar budgeted and got to know the country. I would prefer our Presidents spent their time with their Cabinet Secretaries visiting different parts of the government, and seeing what could be cut from the budget rather than add to the debt. While, I don't expect the new President to personally visit every Federal office and installation to see what is actually going on, although that would be great - he needs to hire someone who will.

When campaigning for office, President Obama promised to go through the Federal budget line by line and cut waste. He lied. He didn't. Instead, he oversaw

a doubling of the national debt.

Those people who have been involved with Washington for a good part of their careers really can't share the experience of an average American. They don't know the effects of Federal legislation on the average person or business.

We no longer expect our leaders to ride into battle as ancient kings did. But at the start of this nation, one of the wealthier men of his time, George Washington, left his farm in Virginia to go to the battlefield to lead the fight for Independence. I understand that he was more comfortable in his tent at Valley Forge than many of his freezing hungry men. Still, I am sure, spending a winter in a tent at Valley Forge wasn't as comfortable as being back home at Mount Vernon in front of a large fireplace. And, when it came time for battle he was mounted on horseback, literally as the Commander in Chief. When he became President he approached the job in the same manner. He may have been President, but he was still an American serving his country. I don't get that feeling of service from our elected officials these days. Paul Ryan, the new Republican Speaker of the House, at the time of this writing, before accepting the Speaker's position, demanded that he be given enough time to spend with his family, and that there be a rules change that enabled him to hold onto the office with a simple majority vote in the event his leadership was challenged. Contrast this with the 1950's novel and film, *The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit*, whose protagonist is a young up and coming business executive who shares the same conundrum as Ryan - family or career. The character in the story, rather than accepting a large promotion, chooses more time with his family and less time with the business. I guess the times and our expectations have changed. I wonder if Paul Ryan were an officer on a battle damaged ship during WW2, would he have demanded a coffee break while the ship was in danger of sinking.