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Editor's Notebook: Being an American Again

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Editor's Notebook

Being an American Again

Tough economic times often create a dismal mood in our nation with a mix of anger, second-guessing and fear enveloping the citizenry. Those who have been hard hit by the downturn readjust their priorities and scale back their dreams; some even adopt a kind of “bunker” mentality as they prepare for the worst. Those that are seen as the culprits who caused the turmoil become the object of public disdain as cries of punishment and revenge fill the air. All in all, not a pretty picture.

The dismal mood in this country is compounded by an ever-widening list of other dangers and declines. An unpopular war, millions living in poverty and without health care insurance, predictions of cataclysmic climate change, and the gap between the haves and the have nots growing daily make for a toxic social and political environment. As Americans look around them it is easy to come to the conclusion that the future of this country is certainly not bright.

But there is another way to look at this down period for America. This is clearly the time to remind ourselves about the strengths of this country and the people who have made the United States as Lincoln said, “... the last great hope of mankind.” Getting out of this mess we are in will not just happen because political leaders take action or government implements policy prescriptions. Turning this country around will only be achieved because we as a people begin again to take seriously those values, principles and beliefs that have for generations made this country special and the envy of the world.

It is important to remember during these dark days those one of a kind American characteristics—the fierce determination to succeed, the courage of those who serve, the willingness to give generously to the needy, the unabashed pride in our individualism and that indefatigable American spirit. We are a people skilled in picking ourselves up by the bootstraps and marching ahead; we are the entrepreneurs to the world; and we are not used to being down on our luck.

It is also important to remember that we are a people of invention, imagination and innovation, a people of good intentions and goodwill, a people of community and self-help, and a people with the unlimited capacity to think big and achieve wonders. Most of all we are a people with self-confidence and a positive outlook. Americans are never fatalistic (except perhaps Chicago Cubs fans).

All economic downturns end and for every problem there is a solution. Unfortunately, for too many years we Americans have been so divided on how to deal with our present and future challenges. Our political leaders from both parties, and at all levels of government, have failed us by spreading and deepening this division. The result is that we have wasted too much time criticizing those who disagree with us, rather than finding common ground. We have forgotten what it means to be an American, and instead just waved the flag and argued over petty concerns.

But this latest economic crisis offers us an opportunity to find our “specialness” as a people, to put what divides us aside and take this country forward. The times that we live in offer us the chance to transform this country, not just with new programs and new reforms, but more importantly with a renewed commitment to be Americans. This country is after all a nation of endless possibilities and countless success stories. All we need to do is to get our act together again and start rebuilding the American dream. It really isn't that difficult; just be ourselves and the rest will take care of itself.

—Michael Kryzanek, Editor, Bridgewater Review

