

Opinion

Paradise found, paradise lost: the cruelty of a missing year

By DENNIS GRUBAUGH

Last spring, my wife and I laid out a beautiful plan for our 40th anniversary. We would visit our 50th state with a mem-



Grubaugh

We're now coming on to 41 years of marriage and three cruise cancellations.

A year of planning, lost to a pandemic.

That story, of course, pales in comparison to the lives that have been lost, a figure approaching 2.5 million around the world and more than half a million here in the states.

The suffering extends to The Aloha State, which has taken extraordinary precautions to keep the virus from entering shore, with limited success, including mandatory quarantines and shutting down of landmarks. It turns out, there

is a limit to paradise. Looking back, we never could have enjoyed a trip by venturing into such an unknown.

Such has been the story of every survivor of coronavirus — people, businesses, churches, schools and other institutions that we so hold dear, caught up in a never-ending battle to enjoy normal. Regardless of whether you personally caught the disease, you are a survivor, and life as you know it has changed.

Now, comes a new chapter as we jockey for long-promised vaccinations. I have always pledged never to expound too much on that which I do not know, but those promised shots in the arm sure have traveled at a snail's pace when compared to the breakneck spread of the virus.

One year removed from the onset of major restrictions, there are many things we can learn from the illness that will be applied in future pandemics. No. 1, I believe, will be to trust more in scientists and less in doubters. No. 2, will be to react without delay.

And, if there is a No. 3, it must be to protect ourselves and each other from contributing to the spread.

Survivors who have caught COVID understand this. I caught it. So did my wife. So, did most of our children, half of

our grandchildren and a few in-laws. It came after we were all at the same Christmas Eve party, gathering as we have always done, but as a smaller family unit. Is that how it happened? None of us knows.

How many others did exactly the same thing during holidays in 2020? I wager most of us. Against all medical advice.

Largely, we escaped with only minor symptoms (temporary loss of smell among them). But I hate having contributed to the case numbers — and I feel guilty by comparison, seeing how other people have suffered much worse, some of them for the entire period since contracting the illness.

Yes, in the year since most of America shut down, we have all lost too much.

- I feel for my grandchildren, trying to get a remote education and knowing that nothing replaces the rich, cultural experience of a classroom setting.

- I grieve over the thousands upon thousands of funerals at which there were few or no mourners, because of the restrictions on visitations.

- I cringe when I think of what happened to businesses, which, if they were able to survive, still had to pivot to completely different circumstances to protect their customers and their employees. This past year will go down as the bleakest for

many businesses and the end for several.

- I feel awful for the places we wanted to go, the events we wanted to attend, the gatherings we wanted to hold — all canceled.

- And I marvel how the most personal celebrations — from birthdays to weddings — have been converted to drive-by viewing.

- More than anything, I worry about the state of our country, with so many of us refusing to accept the obvious dreaded nature of the pandemic.

Ours is not a perfect world, but to rise up in arms, maskless, protesting loss of liberties when all good sense tells you it's not a good idea, is a remarkable statement on the misdirected lives of so many individuals. The information is available to all of us and we must heed our responsibilities as citizens and human beings.

Our trip to Hawaii has been rescheduled again. We'll keep doing it until we get it right. I hope everyone fighting this pandemic will do the same thing.

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Return to government of the people, by the people and for the people

By ALAN J. ORTBALS

It's hard to comprehend how irrelevant the federal government used to be in the lives of its citizens. For example, initially



Ortbals

there were only three cabinet departments: State, Treasury and War. The attorney general was a one-man, part-time job. And Laissez-Faire was a doctrine that held for a hundred years.

Consider, for example, that President James Garfield was shot by an assassin on July 2, 1881, but didn't die until Sept. 19. For those nearly three months, he laid in the White House and his secretary handled whatever business there was to handle. Vice President Chester Arthur never even came to Washington. That's how little the federal government did.

This began to change at the turn of the century as a backlash grew against the robber barons of the gilded age and the financial and social carnage that their economic pillage and hoarding of wealth wrought. In 1890, the richest

1 percent of the population owned 51 percent of the nation's wealth; the lowest 44 percent claimed just 1.2 percent.

Social and labor strife begat a "Progressive" movement in the late 1800s. Teddy Roosevelt was the first president to envision government as a force to improve people's lives. His Square Deal pledge was the precursor of his cousin Franklin's New Deal. But the period between them was a return to laissez-faire and a retreat from active government.

With the election of Franklin Roosevelt in 1932, peoples' view of government began to change. For more than three years after the stock market crashed in 1929, President Herbert Hoover sat by, believing things would right themselves if the government stayed out of the way. They didn't. During that time, more than 10,000 banks failed and unemployment ballooned to 25 percent.

FDR believed that the government needed to get involved and do anything it could to solve the problem. With Congress at his side, more action was taken on behalf of the citizenry in his first 100 days than in the previous 140 years. Legislation was passed to stabilize the banking industry, provide aid to the unemployed, bolster farming, and employ people on public works projects.

Through the New Deal and America's victory in WWII, people came to see

the government as an important part of their lives; that it could and should be used to solve common problems and promote the common welfare.

This attitude toward government lasted for about 50 years during which time we saved Western Europe through the Marshall Plan, built the interstate highway system, created Social Security and Medicare, put a man on the moon and much more. But faith in government began to weaken with the Vietnam war debacle and the Watergate scandal so that by 1981, when President Ronald Reagan proclaimed in his inaugural address, "government is not the solution to our problem, government is the problem," people bought into it. And they chuckled and nodded when he said, "The most terrifying words in the English language are: 'I'm from the government and I'm here to help'."

I don't hold Reagan in the same esteem as many do because I think he started us on several very destructive paths — disdain for government being one of them.

As Winston Churchill said, "Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all the others." It is messy and inefficient and aggravating because in essence it is how 330 million enormously diverse people come together to try to negotiate a path forward.

What has happened over the last 40

years since Reagan delivered his inaugural address is that disdain for government has grown. It has become fashionable, for example, for politicians to run as "outsiders." The thinking is that the less government experience a candidate has had the better. We even elected a president who had no government experience at all. But, when the COVID crisis struck and we needed competent leadership to pull the country together and combat the virus, it wasn't there.

And, in some cases, this disdain for government has grown to outright hatred. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, there are 165, armed, self-proclaimed militia groups in the United States. Some of them were involved in the Jan. 6 insurrection that tried to overturn the presidential election.

This is where disdain for government has delivered us. Over the last 40 years, while we've been sold the idea that "government is not the solution," it has been used by the few for their benefit at the expense of the many. The solution is not to tear it down, it's to fix it. We need to work together to return to what Lincoln spoke of as, "government of the people, by the people and for the people."

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