

Opinion

With great challenges ahead, time to ask the right questions

By DENNIS GRUBAUGH

When I was a young boy, a local newspaper of the day, the St. Louis Globe-Democrat, carried a feature called, “Ask Andy.”



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Questioners could write in and get a response printed in the newspaper, about any topic they wanted explored. School kids were among those invited, and I joined in. To this day, I remember my question. “What are turtle shells made of?” I wanted to know. Simple, right? But you have to remember this was 55 years ago, and this was the mind of a 10-year-old. Times were simpler. I sent in my entry and waited like Ralphie antsy over his return mailing from Ovaltine. Nothing happened. No response. No featurette. Nada. Apparently, “Ask Andy” had more important things to address. Six decades later, I still don’t know what’s in turtle shells besides turtles.

But I still have questions. Fortuitously, I got sidetracked into a profession where everyday topics are still a big deal. Not exactly “Ask Andy” stuff, but readable fodder, nonetheless. Things like: “Did Donald Trump really say that?” “Is Marjorie Taylor Greene for real?” “What did George Santos lie about today?” And, most ponderously: “What are the Kardashians up to?” Reporters could make a career on any of those topics. Some are. I think, though, we’re losing track on the significant stuff. The everyday, gossipy fluff is fun to read, but it occupies too much space. Perhaps it’s time to start looking at the future of the human race? Like, “Are we running out of water?” “How do we stop leaving trillions of dollars of debt to our children?” “Is disinformation ruining civilization?” “Will we have to move from this earth?” After watching the last 60 days of politicking in and out of Congress, I would have to add: “Can’t we all just get along?” To fix anything, we’ll have to do that first. As you get older, your mind starts focusing on what you’ve accomplished in life and how little time you have to affect the future. Asking the right questions takes priority. Getting the right answers is paramount.

A regular reader of my column reached out to me recently, wanting to know my opinion about the state of our union. Why, she asked, do we have to settle on either the current or most recent president? Can’t we have some other good choices without obliging the established way of thinking? Good questions, I thought. Why do we have to settle on a choice between two men who forget to leave classified documents at the office, can’t resolve the debt crisis, and are long past their prime? We don’t, of course, have to settle. There are any number of qualified people interested in the job held by Nos. 45 and 46. But we’ll forego our options totally if we’re not more involved. Failure to ask important questions — which we’ve so often done — becomes our own fault. Now is the time to pay attention. Mr. Trump has announced his intent to run again. Mr. Biden is expected to do the same after this month’s State of the Union. Primary season is less than a year away. The stakes have never been higher. A host of issues threaten us. Climate change is devastating. Reproductive rights are a battlefield. Viruses and various mutations are killing us. Populist movements are ripping apart countries around the globe. Extremism is more pervasive than I ever thought possible.

But the biggest source of destruction is a combination of all these things and our lack of viable solutions, victimized by a void in leadership among two political parties whose chief goal is not to fix crises but to make sure the other party doesn’t have an edge. I wish “Ask Andy” was still around today. I’d flood his inbox. “Is the Fed doing the right thing?” “Are the world’s nuclear arsenals under control?” “Is artificial intelligence going to surpass a human’s?” And just what is a “conservative/liberal leftist/rightist radical agenda” and how does it affect me? Is that the part about ensuring American health? Fixing Social Security? Giving desperate migrants a place in America’s workforce? Respecting our history? Protecting our democracy? How about stressing the problems and not the hyperbole? Yes, America spends too much money. Where can we cut first? How about the baloney? Albert Einstein, great genius that he was, poetically put it all in perspective when he said: “A question that sometimes drives me hazy: am I or are the others crazy?” I ask myself that a lot. And I ask a lot of questions.

Dennis Grubaugh is the retired editor of the Illinois Business Journal.

Fasten your seatbelts. It’s going to be a bumpy year

By ALAN J. ORTBALS

Last summer as the Trump/Mar-a-Lago/classified documents controversy swirled, Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina went on a Fox News program and opined that if Trump was prosecuted, there would be riots in the streets. The liberal media slammed this as a threat. I viewed



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it simply as a prediction. And I thought he was right. 2023 is going to be a year like none other. Trump is under siege from several directions for multiple violations. The Justice Department is currently considering bringing charges against him in the documents case but that’s probably the least serious of his offenses. Last month, a special grand jury in Georgia finished its work and filed its report regarding Trump’s attempt to change the outcome of the state’s 2020 presidential election. With the recorded conversation between Trump and Georgia Secretary of State Brad

Raffensperger, the evidence against him seems to be both clear and powerful. Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis is now reviewing the report and may soon decide to seek his indictment. And, in December, the January 6th Committee completed its work and filed its final report. After 18 months, over 1,000 interviews, and 9 public hearings, the committee reported to the people what it had found—that the insurrection on the 6th of January 2021 was not a standalone incident nor a peaceful rally that just got out of hand. It was the crescendo of a months-long, multi-pronged effort to hold onto power and prevent the peaceful passage of the presidency to the rightful winner of the election. The committee proved that Trump knew his claims of voter fraud were a lie. It detailed how Trump and his allies had tried to strong-arm state officials into finding or disposing of votes; how he worked with others to craft and organize the fake elector scheme; that he tried to get the Department of Justice to back the Big Lie, telling them, “Just call it corrupt and leave the rest to me;” that he attempted to replace the acting Attorney General Jeffrey Rosen with a stooge who would do his bidding when Rosen refused; how he tried to pressure Mike Pence into illegally rejecting electoral votes in key states; how, when Pence refused, he

summoned a mob and sent them to the Capital knowing they were armed and dangerous; how he focused the insurrectionists on Pence; and how he sat by for over three hours watching the riot on TV, taking no action to stop it. Based on all of this evidence, the committee voted unanimously to make four criminal referrals to the Department of Justice: obstructing an official proceeding; conspiring to defraud the government; knowingly and willfully making false statements to the federal government; and inciting or assisting an insurrection. Because the crimes are so serious, the actions so blatant, and the evidence so strong, I believe the DOJ will indict the former president on multiple violations and I believe it will happen this year before the 2024 campaign season begins. All of that is on one side. On the other? Trump has tens of millions of staunch supporters. People who believe that he was making America great again and that the loathsome liberal machine from the mainstream press to the “deep state” were all out to get him from day one. Thousands of them were willing to storm the Capital, engage in hand-to-hand combat with police and even to hang Mike Pence. That’s a lot of kindling wood. Now add some gasoline.

House Speaker Kevin McCarthy is talking about expunging one or both of Trump’s impeachments. This idea had the support of numerous Republican lawmakers in the previous Congress but went nowhere because Democrats were in control. Now, with the Republicans ruling the roost, there is a push to try again. Once revived, I expect the rest of the GOP caucus will climb on the bandwagon and pass it on a party-line vote. Such an action would give a patina of legitimacy to the MAGAist belief that Trump was the victim of partisan persecution and rev up his base. Pour on some more. Now add the new House select committee on the “weaponization of the federal government,” chaired by Trump ally Jim Jordan. I suspect that the true intent of this committee, which Jordan gets to hand pick, is to protect Trump by inflating his cries of, “Witch Hunt,” revving up his base even more. When indictments come, they will be the match that lights the fire, and all hell will break loose. So, get ready. To paraphrase Bette Davis in the 1950s classic film, All About Eve: Fasten your seatbelts. It’s going to be a bumpy year.

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