

Opinion

Conservatives vs. liberals: *Definitions are being reshaped*

By DENNIS GRUBAUGH



Grubaugh

An eighth-grade term paper once made me sit up and think straight, and I think a few of today’s legislators could learn something from it. Miss Vieth, a strict social studies teacher at the old Edwardsville Junior High, asked students to write an essay declaring where they fell on the political spectrum ranging from “conservative” to “liberal,” then spelling out the reasons why. It was a mental challenge, but this future wordsmith was up to it. With assured eloquence, I drafted prose so inspiring as to merit (in my mind at least) an “A.” I handed it in and waited a couple of days. I got an “F.” Seems I forgot to fill in the blank on the first line, asking me if I was conservative or liberal. That, folks, was my indoctrination to the world of politics. If you’re going to enter the arena, you’d better have all your facts. My mistake was forgetting the headline at the top, which is

not unlike today’s officeholders, whose kneejerk actions are too-often made without consideration of consequence. Take the Tennessee House of Representatives. Last month, in a historic, troubling decision, a Republican majority voted to expel two Democratic legislators for their participation in a boisterous capital protest over gun control, which was brought on by the horrific killings of six people at a parochial school in Nashville. Rather than show empathy to victims, the assembly voted to get rid of two members joining in the mourning. Expulsion is normally reserved for legislators who engage in criminal conduct, not House rulebreakers using their right to free speech. Now, take Florida — please. The Republican-controlled legislature last month pushed through an inane bill that eliminates the requirement to obtain a permit to carry a concealed firearm. Beginning July 1, 2023, concealed carry will be legal for lawfully owned weapons. Florida is, of course, the state that gave us two of the worst mass shootings in history (the Pulse nightclub in Orlando and Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland). This is also the state offering the best of Gov. Ron DeSantis, who is maneuvering to lead the nation rightward. In their collective race to the partisan bottom, some legislators have

lost their minds. They’ve forgotten they serve the people, not the party. Conservative and liberal labels no longer mean what they once did. Each is viewed by the other as extremist. Look up the terms in the dictionary and you’ll see the same definitions I saw in 1970. “Liberal,” as a noun, is defined in part as willingness to respect or accept behavior or opinions different from one’s own; one who is open to new ideas; or in a political context one who favors policies that promote social welfare. “Conservative,” as a noun, is defined as one who is averse to change or innovation, one who holds traditional values; or in a political context one who favors free enterprise, private ownership, and socially traditional ideas. Both definitions reflect concepts worth fighting for — like individual freedom and human dignity. Nowhere do you see words or phrases like abortion, gun control, voting rights or climate change. Those are gray issues best addressed by centrist minds, not by the extreme left or right dominating today’s headlines. Back in the day, I identified as a conservative mainly from an economic point of view, simply because that’s the way I was raised. Don’t spend money you don’t have.

Now, conservatism has morphed into a political party that wants to push its ideological agenda on the rest of society. Liberalism isn’t much better. For years, liberals were appreciated as a compassionate bunch. Now they look more like sailors on shore leave, spending money faster than it’s being made, trying to do everything for everybody. Today, I find it hard to identify with either party’s trajectory, which is headed as fast as possible from the middle of the spectrum and toward its fringe. If there is change on the horizon, it rests with the generations who came of age in the 1990s, about the time of the Columbine High School shooting, when the madness seemed to take hold. These are the voters who will replace the larger, more complacent bloc of the modern electorate — boomers, to be frank, who don’t have the strength to stand up and fight the nonsense. Given this trend, it will take only a couple of election cycles for 2023’s rabblers to become history, voted from office for their inability to find the word compromise in the dictionary. Just as my curmudgeonly teacher Miss Vieth once did to me, self-serving public servants should be given an “F.”

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

Meet Ron DeSantis

By ALAN J. ORTBALS



Ortals

Despite the fact that Donald Trump was soundly defeated in his 2020 re-election bid, he maintains his grip on the Republican base. 55 percent favor him over other announced and likely candidates for the 2024 presidential nomination. But his candidacy has a big question mark hovering over it. He’s the first president to be indicted and I think more indictments will come prior to election day. Will he be able to run even if his base wants him to? If not him, who? Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis is his closest challenger at this point with the support of 26 percent. No one else rises above single digits. So, it’s fair to ask, who is Ron DeSantis? On the one hand, he has an impressive resume. He received his bachelor’s degree from Yale University and J.D. from Harvard law. He then joined the US Navy after which he was elected to Congress three times before running for governor in 2018. He won narrowly that year but his huge victory last November

against former governor Charlie Crist catapulted him over other contenders for the 2024 GOP nomination. Did I mention that Florida is the fastest growing state in the union? A lot for a Republican voter to get excited about. But, on the other hand... Florida’s population growth is mainly due to the Baby Boom. Retirees are fleeing the ice and snow of the north for the warmth of the sunshine state. 89 percent of Florida residents 65 or over were born elsewhere. The state ranks 46th in the percentage of residents who have some form of health insurance. No doubt that contributes to its poor health outcomes. According to the Commonwealth Fund, Floridians have a lower life expectancy than most other states and higher incidences of cancer deaths, diabetes, fatal overdoses, and infant mortality. Meanwhile, the property insurance market is in crisis. Some insurers are leaving the state; others are seeking premium increases of as much as 60 percent. But DeSantis has bigger fish to fry. He works tirelessly to project the persona of Anti-Woke Warrior. In the aftermath of Trump’s Big Lie that the 2020 election was stolen, DeSantis created an Office of Election Crimes and Security to stamp out voter fraud. What he’s found so far, and announced with great fanfare, was 20 ex-convicts who had been told they

could vote, were registered by elections officials to vote, and then voted. He’s actually prosecuting these people. He’s harped incessantly about plane-loads of illegal aliens being secretly flown into the state in the middle of the night. So, it makes you wonder why, when he wanted to grab the spotlight away from Texas Gov. Greg Abbott and fly immigrants to Martha’s Vineyard, he had to go to Texas to get them. That’s because those nefarious planes only carried unaccompanied children who the immigration service was connecting with parents or other guardians. The same thing has been going on for years under multiple administrations. Florida ranked 18th highest for Covid death rate—I suspect that it was much worse than that as tourists probably contracted it there and took it home with them. That’s because of DeSantis’s Hunger Games approach to the pandemic. He issued an executive order prohibiting any business—including cruise ships—from requiring proof of vaccination. He forbade schools from requiring face masks and the state school board, which he controls, warned that there would be consequences if any local board ignored the order. And, when the Special Olympics International announced that it would require all athletes to be vaccinated to participate in last year’s games to be held in Orlando, he threatened them with a \$27.5 million fine. The SOI backed down.

Speaking of education, DeSantis signed into law a ban on teaching Critical Race Theory in schools. It wasn’t being taught anyway but now teachers are threatened if any lesson might include material that might make students “feel guilt, anguish, or other forms of psychological distress because of actions, in which the person played no part, committed in the past by other members of the same race, color, national origin, or sex.” Speaking as a former social studies teacher, that leaves out a whole lot of history. In 2020, residents of Key West, fed up with the mushrooming cruise ship business and the impact it was having on the community and on the delicate ecosystem, surrounding it, voted overwhelmingly to limit the number and size of cruise ships that could dock at its port. DeSantis would have none of it and got the legislature to pass a law that forbade the city from blocking access. So much for local control. And, just in the past few months, DeSantis signed bills that criminalizes abortion after six weeks and allows any yahoo to carry a concealed weapon without a permit. That’s Ron DeSantis. If you like all of that, you’ve found your candidate.

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