

Opinion

Taking on antidemocracy instigators, one voice at a time

By Dennis Grubaugh



Grubaugh

America, post Jan. 6, 2021, is moving in a troubling direction.

Our politics, our principles, even our trust in each other are at historic lows. You can cite any number of reasons but an orga-

nized rebellion like we witnessed at the U.S. Capitol two years ago is the worst of the cumulative effects.

Can we move forward from the hate displayed during the insurrection? As the world's greatest democracy, we must. We have an enormous tear in our Republic's fabric. Yet, I don't think it's beyond repair.

Last month's conviction of members of the Proud Boys and the sentencing of the first of the Oath Keepers are a good start.

Five members of the far-right Proud Boys were convicted in connection with the riots, with four of the five guilty of seditious conspiracy.

The head of a similar anti-gov-

ernment group, Stewart Rhodes of the Oath Keepers, became the first sentenced for the same crime. Eight more from his group are on the list.

The exceptional charge is leveled against two or more people in any place subject to United States jurisdiction when they conspire to overthrow or destroy the government; or to levy war against us; or use force to prevent or delay execution of federal law; or use force to seize or possess U.S. property contrary to authority.

It is an applicable law for those who violently attempt to thwart a presidential transition. I believe general anarchy was their first aim and timing of the election was convenient. Just as it might again be in 2024.

Sedition calls for maximum 20-year sentence, and the severity is merited. After all, the slightly more enhanced charge of treason calls for death by execution, among punishments.

I think the day of the siege will become — like D-Day, 9/11 and Pearl Harbor — one of the pivotal moments in history. It was an event that stains us. And we should never forget.

Frighteningly, these convictions are but a few examples of what is pending in the legal system. More than 1,000 people from all walks of life have been charged, with at least 572 pleading

guilty. Some 85 have had trials, and only one person has been totally acquitted. NPR has been running a periodic recap.

At least 355 were accused of assaulting law enforcement officers. Some 235 have been sentenced, according to Department of Justice figures.

Five people died as a result of the chaos and more than \$2.8 million in damage was done to the Capitol property. As many as 2,000 people may have been involved — a relatively small number except for the billion people around the globe who were impacted by what they saw.

No one knows what kind of power the neo-fascist Proud Boys and violence-prone Oath Keepers still wield, but surely, they suffered a blow in recruitment. History is rife, though, of examples of underestimating white supremacy. In recent weeks there have been other such rallies, including one notable one at the National Mall by another lamebrain group known as the Patriot Front. The nation watched in amusement as video made the rounds of a lone bicyclist, Joe Flood, who stopped to shout insults from the sideline, apparently to great effect.

Let's get this straight: These proud and the loud are not patriots. Real patriots are guys like Joe Flood, who stand up for their country by living within its laws. When they want to change things,

they go to the city council meeting or the ballot box or they peacefully protest. Or they simply serve as quiet role models, living life humbly but demonstrably. Such men and women command respect.

President Biden called out domestic terrorism in his re-election speech this past month, and rightfully so. I believe, as do most Americans, that internal discord is worse right now than foreign aggression, and there are grave risks of ignoring either one.

What happened Jan. 6 was not about freedom of speech. It was more of a frenzy, much like you'd see at a foreign soccer match where crazed fans end up trampling each other. By his inflammatory words, Donald Trump fomented the insurrection weeks before the riots took place. Since that day, he's downplayed the violence and suggested he will pardon the convicted participants.

Whether you listen to his inane rants or not, you had eyes with which to witness the history yourself.

The instigators and criminals behind the day don't deserve pardons. They deserve prosecution equal to their role. They need to be called out, publicly and continuously. Anyone who uses violence to subvert civilized society doesn't belong in one.

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

On diversity, Elon Musk and other random ramblings

By Alan J. Ortals



Ortals

Diversity pays

When I taught social studies back in the 70's, I conducted an exercise with all my classes. Students were given the following scenario. They were astronauts who had crash landed

on the moon. They were fine but their spaceship was destroyed. It was possible to reach a lunar station on foot but only if they made good decisions. They were given a list of 20 items available on the craft and asked to rank them from 1 to 20 in order of importance to their survival. I gave them about 10 minutes to do that then I assembled them into groups of 5 or 6. The groups were to discuss their lists and arrive at a single group list. Upon completion, I would announce the correct order and reasoning for each and score the individual and group lists. Invariably, the groups did better than any individual in the group. That was because in a group they were able to pool

their knowledge, experience, and opinions.

It was an exercise in synergy but it's a good lesson for business, too. The international business consulting company, Boston Consulting Group, has found that diversity pays. According to its analysis, companies with more diverse management teams have 19 percent higher revenues due to innovation. "Diversity is not just a metric to be strived for," BCG reported, "it is actually an integral part of a successful revenue-generating business."

Vacancies + Cash = Opportunity

An organization called St. Louis Vacancy Collaborative recently released its database of more than 24,000 vacant parcels in the City of St. Louis—15,586 vacant lots; 8,740 vacant buildings—with detailed information on each. If you go to its website, stlvacancy.com, you can open a map that shows the location of each parcel. It's rather breathtaking to see the devastation displayed graphically. As you may suspect, most of those vacancies are located north of Delmar. The Collaborative has now been tasked with developing a strategy to deal with this scourge.

The City has a huge opportunity. It has \$280 million from the Rams settlement and another \$500 million in covid relief funds. Those funds should be used to

assemble property just as they did for the NGA project but with the goal of creating jobs and wealth in north St. Louis. This area was once very successful with quality homes, good schools, retail goods and services. People worked at the Chevy plant, the Rexall Drug plant, Carter carburetor, and many others. They shopped in stores on Easton (now MLK) and N. Kingshighway and the Welston Loop. But that thriving community has long since gone.

The City needs to use its funds to assemble and prepare the land, install infrastructure, and lure manufacturers, assemblers, packagers and service companies to strategically located business parks, providing jobs for people who need them and creating wealth that will support home ownership and retail spending.

Land assembly in old urban areas is one of the biggest barriers to redevelopment and revitalization. Data and dollars are often lacking. St. Louis now has both. It must put that data and those dollars to work rebuilding north St. Louis.

New Bond villain?

With his chaotic takeover of Twitter, Elon Musk has been the butt of a lot of jokes, but I find him alarming. Consider that you have an eccentric multi-billionaire with authoritarian tendencies

who has his own space program and is encircling the world with satellites. Sounds like the plot of a James Bond movie to me. I wouldn't be surprised if he has a white cat. I just hope there's some way to keep a rein on this guy.

Positive politics

There was a very interesting election recently—for mayor of the city of Jacksonville, Florida. Jacksonville is the most populous city in Florida and the largest city in the lower 48 states geographically. That's because the city merged with Duval County in 1968 (are you paying attention, St. Louis?). It's pretty evenly split politically. Biden won it in 2020. DeSantis and Rubio won there in 2022. What's interesting—and perhaps important—about the recent mayoral election is that one candidate, Donna Deegan, vowed to run a positive campaign. Her opponent ran countless negative ads against her. Most people hate the vitriol we have to endure every election, but politicians run attack ads because they work—or they used to. Deegan didn't run a single negative ad and still won by 4 points. Hopefully, her strategy is a harbinger of things to come.

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