

Opinion

An American paradise must be allowed to return, stronger

By DENNIS GRUBAUGH



Grubaugh

Last November, my buddy Mike and I left a waterside restaurant after a nice lunch. I paused for a second to raise my phone for a quick selfie of two retirees enjoying the moment. “Kimo’s,” the sign behind us said. “Seafood. Steaks. Grog.” Today, that snapshot holds a very dear memory, but sadly, it is also now part of my broken heart, along with the collective heart of a nation. Last month, the restaurant in the picture burned to the ground, as did almost everything in the town surrounding it, in what has become one of America’s worst tragedies. Abetted by a vulnerable electric grid and fanned by a hurricane hundreds of miles away, winds whipped grass fires across the island of Maui, sending hundreds of years of history into oblivion in mere hours. The worst of the scenes was the town

of Lahaina, one of Hawaii’s great tourist treasures. The historic Front Street district, home to Kimo’s restaurant and dozens of other similar establishments that lined the Pacific waterfront, was reduced to ashes. At least 2,200 homes and structures were damaged or destroyed in a town that once had 13,000 residents, many of whom became homeless. Worst of all is the loss of life. Each passing day has added victims to the list of those who perished, and at this writing many of the dead have yet to be identified. Officially, the toll represents the worst natural disaster in state history and the worst from a fire in the United States in more than a century. Miraculous tales of survival have emerged, along with escalating complaints about who or what exactly is to blame. Many facts must be ascertained even as solutions are implemented. Amid all this are the cherished memories of everyone who ever visited. That includes many thousands of people from Southern Illinois. For weeks now, I struggled to compare this to something that people could understand. Imagine if the wonderful town of Grafton, Ill., was suddenly wiped off the map? That nearly happened in 1993 when the Mississippi and Illinois rivers veered out

of control during the Great Flood. The water went down in Grafton. But it has since come up again and again, and each time the city was able to survive, stronger. In truth, much of the town is on higher ground than most people know, but in ’93 it was virtually cut off from the outside world. It took years of rebuilding and millions of dollars in federal and individual investment to turn the city into the tourist destination that it became. Still, townspeople worry every year when the water starts to cross the road. So it is in Lahaina, where flooding would have been preferable to the nightmare that unfolded. Many victims jumped into the ocean to survive, while others burned in their cars as they tried to flee. Because electricity and the internet were down, most people had little forewarning of what was about to descend. There has been much second-guessing, and it will take needed years to understand it all. For inhabitants of the other 49 states, Hawaii is not easy to get to. It is 4,000 miles from Edwardsville, Ill., to Maui. Yet I know hundreds of people who have made the trek to paradise — many times — because there is no other place like it on earth. One of my friends, the late Walt Parrill of Collinsville, was in Maui often and recommended some of the restaurants

that our families enjoyed during our November trip. We also went to Fleetwood’s on Front Street, owned by singer Mick Fleetwood. It, too, succumbed. Many people know of the banyan trees that are part of Hawaii’s legacy. The oldest of those, perhaps the oldest in the world, is in Lahaina and was scorched, but many people believe the deep roots will survive. The cultural museum next to the banyan park was lost. Lahaina was the first capital of the Hawaiian kingdom — designated in 1820 by King Kamehameha II. It remained that way until 1845, when it was replaced by Honolulu, on Oahu island. Maui holds much that is sacred to native islanders. Lahaina was the economic hub of Maui, which is mostly vast, green, volcanic terrain. Residents will eventually return, and I believe businesses will absolutely rebuild. And, like in every disaster, they will need a boost as they do. We should help where possible. I suspect every person who has been to Hawaii has had a similar reaction. We must never allow ourselves to forget that our fondest memories can be gone in the blink of an eye. Treasure them while we can.

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

Trump trial must be televised

By ALAN J. ORTBALS



Ortbals

Last month a federal grand jury passed down an indictment against Donald J. Trump, charging him with four felonies: Conspiracy to defraud the United States. Conspiracy to obstruct an official proceeding. Obstruction of and attempt to obstruct an official proceeding. And, conspiracy against rights. This is true, factual, and uncontested. However, what you think about this largely depends on where you get your news, and those sources are about as far apart as the north and south rims of the Grand Canyon. Generally speaking, the left-leaning media reported the indictment as both extraordinarily serious and absolutely essential to the future of the Republic. Both CNN and MSNBC spent hour after hour commenting on the gravity of the accusations and spit balling about what will happen next and when.

“This is a grave day and a serious one for our country,” said MSNBC host Rachel Maddow, “a black-letter, bold-faced date. August 1, 2023, is the date on which a former president and the leading presidential candidate of the Republican Party was indicted in federal court, accused of leading multiple criminal conspiracies to try to hold power by force after he was voted out of office by the people.” According to MSNBC, the indictment clearly delineated Trump’s illegal attempt to hold onto power including pressuring Vice President Mike Pence to reject Biden electoral votes, the organizing fake electors to submit fraudulent electoral votes, attempting to use the Justice Department to derail the electoral process, and fomenting the attack on the Capital. “If Trump was not held to account in a court of law for his democracy-busting crimes,” opined MSNBC columnist Glenn Kirschner, “then every four years, Jan. 6 of the year following a presidential election could very well look like Jan. 6, 2021.” But, if you get your news from Fox or other right-wing outlets, you get a whole different picture of reality. The right-wing media portrayed the indictment as the backlash of the establishment. Trump, it goes, was a disrupter who took on the deep state to drain the swamp and now the establishment is out to get him.

Fox News host Jesse Watters called the latest indictment against Trump “legal mumbo jumbo” and said the 45-page document read like an “MSNBC script.” Fox star Sean Hannity went further. “This is an incredibly weak, baseless, convoluted indictment, it is bizarrely centered around what is clearly protected speech, zero criminal statutes, because there are none that were applicable that are actually written into law. It is based on an obscure law from the civil war. Let’s be even more clear, this indictment is frankly not worth the paper that it’s printed on. This is a political persecution, through and through,” Hannity argued. And Fox star, Laura Ingraham, piled on, claiming Biden had weaponized the government to attack his political opponents. “Biden’s henchmen aren’t defenders of democracy,” said Ingraham, “they are offenders of democracy. The DOJ’s goal here is very clear: you get in our way, you threaten to root out D.C. corruption, and we will do whatever it takes to destroy you by using the full force of the federal law enforcement against you.” Following Trump’s arraignment on August 3, MSNBC empaneled 5 of its biggest stars to discuss every aspect of the proceeding. Flip over to Fox and they had a panel discussing the “Biden crime family.” This immense media bias is largely

responsible for the chasm in our society. You choose your news and that becomes your reality. But there really is a reality and it is essential that we pierce the media veil in the upcoming Trump trial so we can see it for ourselves. Federal courts don’t allow photographs and they don’t allow television coverage. For the arraignment we had to depend on artist’s renderings and media accounts. If we do the same in the Trump trial, citizens will have to rely on the media interpretation of the proceedings and clearly that will further tear Americans apart perhaps to the point of violence. This trial, one of the most momentous in American history, must be televised so that everyone can see exactly and first-hand what the evidence is against him and what defense he offers in response. People may ignore it in favor of maintaining their own beliefs, but it’s the only way to get the truth out. In the 1930s, Franklin Roosevelt conducted “fireside chats” on the radio so he could bypass the yellow journalism of arch enemy William Randolph Hearst who owned most of the newspapers in the country and talk directly to the people. We need to do something like that again.

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