



How Do We Celebrate Democracy ?

Eugene Goldwasser



The winter of 2021 has only continued our isolation from others because of COVID. (It's been a full year since we traveled anywhere, had guests for dinner or ate in a restaurant.) We experienced a huge snowstorm, 15-24 inches depending on where you live, watched the inauguration of the 46th president despite the best efforts of the former, and the invasion of the Capitol building by "domestic terrorists" and extremists. Another impeachment trial looms with the former president accused of abetting an insurrection to remain in power. By the time you receive this newsletter, there should be a resolution in the senate regarding the verdict.

Despite these woes, the United States will continue to function as a beacon of democracy and will reclaim its status as the leader of the free world. In the short time since he was inaugurated, President Biden has acted to put his administration together, had many of his cabinet secretaries approved, and redirected efforts towards defeating COVID by releasing millions of vaccine doses to the states and promising 100 million vaccinations in his first 100 days in office. He has plans to sign a \$1.9 trillion stimulus package designed to keep the economy flourishing, provide \$1400 grants to individuals, extend unemployment benefits through September, rejoin the Paris Climate Accord, and discuss restarting the Iran Nuclear Agreement. A flurry of executive orders rolled back many of those initiated by his predecessor. President Biden aims to provide help for refugees (raising the total allowed into the U.S from 15,000 to 125,000 per year), preserve and fortify the provisions of DACA and provide an eight-year path to citizenship for the 11 million undocumented immigrants who have been in the U.S. for many years and who contribute to both the employment and tax base. In addition, he halted the con-

struction of the border wall and the Keystone Oil Pipeline, and initiated investigations into meat packing plants that have been rampant with COVID infections. Although some could argue that many of the issues covered by the executive orders would be better served initiated by Congress and enacted into law, Congress has been noticeably recalcitrant to move on many of them in the past. As a result, they have festered like an open wound dividing the electorate.

The good news is that vaccines are working and millions of Americans have been and will continue to be vaccinated. Whether it is Pfizer, Moderna or Johnson & Johnson, receiving a vaccine should help get us to "herd immunity" by the end of the summer. What we don't know is whether a booster shot will be necessary next fall to continue to provide immunity from viral variants.

How schools and children are affected by operating remotely is a serious question. Also, how teachers teach about the Capitol insurrection of January 6th or the efforts to disavow the results of the Electoral College are questions with which we have concerns. What should have been standard operating procedure for Congress to count the electoral vote and the vice-president to announce the winner of the election became a dangerous undertaking. Five people including a Capitol police officer died and the Capitol endured a siege until a force consisting of police and national guardsmen were able to rid the building of the invaders. How to instill the idea that our citizens should be supporting and celebrating our democratic principles rather than tearing down our democracy is an essential reason we will be discussing this issue in future meetings.

NYSRSAS President, Gene Goldwasser, was a school principal for 24 years. Since retiring, he has been a Hofstra adjunct professor and a coach with the Institute for Student Achievement.

TRANSFER OF THE PRESIDENCY: LESSON IN LEADERSHIP

Edward Price

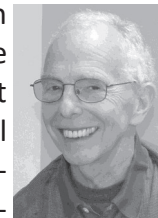
Watching Trump’s actions during the transfer of the presidency to Joe Biden led me to think about how other leaders respond in similar circumstances. An analogous situation is when superintendents in politically divided school districts are faced with a change in the board majority resulting in a change in leadership. Having observed several of these changes, I found that educational leaders have a commitment to the community and its children. Although disappointed with the board’s decision, they want to ensure the system continues to provide uninterrupted quality services for students. Therefore, they invite the successor to meet key staff members and to review potential issues that may arise even though these efforts may not be well received. This is the process followed by good leaders in any area.

Unfortunately, Trump again demonstrates that he does not comprehend the essence of leadership. Facing increasing victims of the COVID-19 pandemic, he continued to deny it was a problem. While the plan to expedite development of a vaccine was successful, distribution to millions of citizens is a major task requiring extensive planning and coordination of services. Instead of planning for this daunting task, Trump spent weeks tweeting unfounded allegations that he won the election and refused to share critical information with the president-elect who is now responsible for implementation. While focusing on conspiracy theories, a record number of Americans were dying.

In addition to the pandemic, there are many international issues that will transcend Trump’s term of office. The 9/11 Commission, reviewing the attacks of September 2001, indicated that the delay in the presidential transfer caused by vote disputes in Florida may have contributed to lack of preparation for potential terrorist actions. Failure to follow the Commission’s guidance is not only irresponsible, but it might also be considered treasonous.

When I first prepared these comments, I considered Trump to be a narcissist lacking basic leadership skills. Since then, some of his supporters who can be described as nothing less than terrorists, stormed the Capitol to prevent Congress from receiving the Electoral College ballots. This was clearly an act of insur-

rection encouraged by Trump. Although I originally thought Trump should be permitted to leave office without threat of prosecution to prevent additional national division, the act of inciting terrorism and sedition cannot be permitted to go unchallenged. It is time for responsible Senators, both Republican and Democrat, to recognize Trump’s failures as a leader, convict him for high crimes and misdemeanors and prevent him from ever returning to public office.



Dr. Edward Price served as superintendent in several New York and New Jersey school districts. He is currently a lecturer in educational leadership at Stony Brook University.

ARE OUR NYS PENSIONS SECURE?

Edward Price

As a result of the economic difficulties created by the COVID virus, Governor Cuomo indicated that without federal support, New York State would have to make severe reductions in all areas. Naturally, we all question how this situation will affect our pensions. Fortunately, public employee pensions in New York State are constitutionally protected. Article V Section 7 of the New York State Constitution states membership in any pension or retirement system of the state or a civil division thereof is considered a contractual relationship which may not be diminished or impaired. Moreover, the New York State Court of Appeals, in the case of *Birnbaum v New York State Teachers Retirement System (1958)*, held that NYSTRS could modify retirement benefits only at the time of employment since these benefits are vested and become a contract. As a result of that decision, NYSTRS now has several tiers of benefits.

Moreover, NYSTRS is economically sound. It is one of the best funded plans in the nation. TRS reports that despite the volatile economic conditions caused by the pandemic, the plan remains exceptionally well-funded and safe. This means the plan has sufficient funds to pay promised benefits to its retirees, as well as cover the accrued benefits of active members.

THE PANDEMIC'S RISING TOLL ON CHILDREN

Mary Louise Haley



Even as governments race to administer the new COVID vaccines, UNICEF, the United Nations agency for children, is warning that “the future of an entire generation is at risk.” The report is based on surveys from 140 countries and raises an alarm for the long-term toll of the COVID-19 epidemic on children and communities. The pandemic has created conditions unlike anything we have seen before, making it difficult to project what the long-term consequences will be for school-age children in the future.

Currently, 30% of students nationwide have not returned to the classroom since March and are learning remotely. In some major urban areas- Los Angeles, Chicago and Las Vegas- schools remain closed as the positive COVID cases continue to surge. Other urban and suburban schools have opened and closed intermittently based on COVID-19 transmission rates. School disruptions and closures have interfered with access to essential services for children who live in under-served communities, and those who are homeless or victims of abuse.

Students are experiencing the academic toll from school disruptions in different ways and with varying degrees of intensity. For children who are attending school remotely or in hybrid settings, students report difficulty remaining engaged in online lessons and participating in class discussions in Zoom meetings. The degree to which parents or caring adults are available to monitor their child’s success in managing and completing assignments varies depending on their experience with technology, their own work schedule and other family demands, such as caring for an elderly parent. Consequently, the degree to



which students in any one classroom, across a grade level in one school, and/or in one school district have mastered specific skills or curriculum will vary widely.

Some school districts are already collecting and analyzing data points on student progress in order to monitor whether groups of

students are falling behind. Currently, it appears that students are making academic progress overall, but there is data indicating an increase in the number of students failing courses or lagging behind their peers. Educators are expecting that more significant gaps will be revealed as they collect more data and as students move into the next grade level. Administrators across the country are already discussing how to create a wider safety net to provide needed academic support to a significantly larger group of students than they have previously served. These gaps will be far greater for students with disabilities, English language learners and those who live at or below the poverty level, placing them at greater risk for academic failure and limiting their employment opportunities in the future.



The social isolation caused by the pandemic has taken an emotional toll on many Americans but the impact on teenagers is especially severe. Teenagers rely on friendships to navigate the social maze and pressures of high school. Recent surveys indicate that a third of teenagers report feeling anxious and depressed due to the loss of their typical connections to teachers, peers and friends. Based on a recent analysis of the proportion of emergency room visits related to mental health, the CDC has raised significant concerns about the effect lockdowns and social distancing have had on youth. School psychologists have also noted an increase in the number of young children who are also showing symptoms of emotional distress. Psychologists speculate that young children will suffer delayed social and emotional development due to the amount of time they have been forced to spend alone or with limited peer contact.

In response to these concerns, school administrators are taking immediate steps to monitor students’ emotional well-being and implement innovative approaches to providing support. In order to cast a wider safety net to address the increased need, many districts are taking *(cont’d on page 5)*

FROM THE DESK OF: *The Reflective Retiree*

WE REMEMBER . . .

Corine Lipset-Huberman



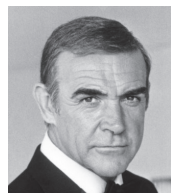
Welcome to 2021! I'm sure most of you, like me, are happy to see 2020 behind us. I wish you all a very Happy New Year and hope that this new year will bring us all good health, much joy and a return to normalcy. The development of vaccines that we expect will be available to all over the coming months will bring needed relief.

The past year brought us much sadness, with a raging pandemic still with us. Many Americans suffered the loss of loved ones – losing family members and friends whose lives were curtailed too early by this dreadful disease. In addition, as a nation we lost a number of individuals in the fields of entertainment, sports and politics who we will sorely miss. Regretfully, there are too many to list here. I have culled from the list some of those personalities whose ages range from 80 to above. Those are the people that we, as retirees, grew up with and perhaps remember fondly. A few accrued fame when they were older so that both we and our children knew them well.

In the field of entertainment, we lost several notable actors and actresses. I, personally, shall never forget Olivia de Havilland (died at 104) in "Gone with the Wind." She played Scarlett O'Hara's sister-in-law, Melanie Wilkes, the sweet wife of Ashley, in contrast to the mischievous, sexy Scarlett. She was nominated for five Academy Awards during her career, winning two. In 2008, President George W. Bush presented Ms. de Havilland with the National Medal of Arts. Rhonda Fleming, who lived to 97, was another Hollywood beauty, who was known as the "Queen of Technicolor."



Sean Connery (90), whose acting career spanned seven decades, was the original James Bond, the sexy and charismatic secret agent, whose movies enticed both men and women of all ages. In 1988 he won an Oscar for "The Untouchables" and in 2000, was knighted in the New

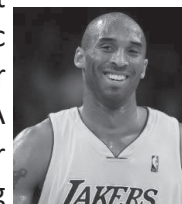


Year Honours Program for services to film drama. Kirk Douglas (103), of legendary fame, starred in about 75 movies whose stories ran the gamut from ancient Roman times to modern romances. With his handsome physique and cleft chin, he was a great favorite of all ages and genders. Jerry Stiller (92) brought comedic relief as a cast member of "Seinfeld." David Prowse (85) was the actor behind the Darth Vader mask in the original Star Wars trilogy, known both to us and to our children. We knew Orsen Bean (91) for his role in "The Twilight Zone." Some knew Wilford Brimley as an actor. Most of us probably don't recall his name but certainly remember him as the face of Quaker Oats as we ate our morning cereal.



Several familiar faces will no longer appear on the TV screen. The very popular host of "Jeopardy," Alex Trebek (80), recently lost his life to pancreatic cancer as his fans saluted his long career and praised him to the end. Another popular TV host for many years was Regis Philbin (88), who holds the Guinness World Record for an actor logging the most hours on US TV. A multi-talented Hall of Famer who won 12 EMMYs, Carl Reiner laid the building blocks of TV comedy in the 50s and 60s. A writer, director, actor, author and frequent guest on numerous TV shows, Reiner was active in many pursuits until his death at the age of 98.

The year 2020 also saw the passing of several sports stars. Don Larsen (90), the famed New York Yankees player, pitched a perfect World Series game in 1956. A tragic and more recent passing at a younger age was that of Kobe Bryant, the NBA star, who lost his life in a helicopter crash alongside eight others, including his 13 year old daughter, Gianna.



A tragic loss to the country was the passing of John Lewis at age 80. Having survived numerous beatings and prison sentences in his quest to im-

WE REMEMBER . . .
(cont'd from page 4)

prove civil rights, particularly for black people, Lewis succumbed to pancreatic cancer. He worked tirelessly as a civil rights leader, both as a private citizen and then as a congressman. His final message to his colleagues and to the American people is worth repeating here. *Though I may*



not be here with you, I urge you to answer the highest calling of your heart and stand up for what you truly believe. In my life I have done all I can to demonstrate that the way of peace, the way of love and nonviolence is the more excellent way. Now it is your turn to let freedom ring.

Another terrible loss to the country was the passing of Ruth Bader Ginsburg at age 87. A women’s rights pioneer and Supreme Court Justice, her passing led to a drastic change in the composition of the Court that will have far-reaching effects for the next decade or even longer. Justice Ginsburg wrote many notable majority opinions, as well as passionate dissents, which in time led her fans to dub her the “notorious R.B.G.” She unified the liberal block of the Court and charmed everyone with her intelligence and quick wit. Fighting to the end for women to have equal status with men,



she said “women will have achieved true equality when men share with them the responsibility of bringing up the next generation.”

This past year saw the passing of many important and well-known people. We have only touched upon a few of them in this paper. They have touched our lives in different ways and we remember them, or not, in different degrees. Perhaps a good way to end this paper is a sentence written by the American author and theologian, Frederick Buechner. *The life I touch for good or ill will touch another life, and that in turn another, until who knows where the trembling stops or in what far place my touch will be felt.*

Happy New Year to all! May it be a year of joy!

Dr. Corine Lipset-Huberman has had extensive experience at all levels of education. She spent the last 19 years prior to retirement as principal of the Village Elementary School in Syoset, NY.

THE PANDEMIC’S TOLL . . .
(cont'd from page 3)

a multi-tiered approach that includes student self-reporting, school and community mental health services, and parent training workshops. Districts are utilizing the technology tools that they put in place for remote learning to deliver surveys directly to students through their school email. Based on this data, students who appear at-risk are assigned to school mental health professionals who reach out to them directly and monitor how they are doing on an ongoing basis. In response to increased caseloads some school districts have been able to meet the need by hiring additional school psychologists, social workers and school counselors. Foremost among these challenges, districts are experiencing an increased number of serious mental health problems in students that require treatment beyond that which schools can provide. In order to address this crisis, some districts are seeking to form consortiums in order to create a Mental Health Network for hospital outreach. Districts have also repurposed video conferencing tools put in place for remote learning to host parent workshops. The goal of these workshops is to teach parents what to look for and how to respond to children’s behaviors or symptoms of emotional distress that they may see at home.

The serious academic and educational toll the pandemic is taking on this generation will extend well into the future. As vaccinations become more available, school staff and parents will feel an increased sense of security and schools will slowly be able to return to full-time, in-person instruction. But the challenge and expense of addressing these challenges, now and for the foreseeable future, place a significant burden on our schools. It is urgent that the federal government demonstrate a sustained commitment to sufficiently fund state education systems, as schools serve a vital role in protecting and supporting our youngest citizens during this unprecedented crisis.

Mary Louise Haley (Mel). Started her career as a special education teacher. She retired as an Elementary School Principal from the Herricks Public Schools and is presently serving as Education Chair for NYSRSAS.

AUTUMN QUARTERLY QUERY—PRESIDENTIAL PRIORITIES

In our autumn issue, we asked readers to look ahead to the start of the new administration and tell us what they see as the top priorities for the new President. Here are the responses we received:

President Biden’s First 100 Days should focus on:

1. **Restoring confidence of the American people in the Presidency:** With the division of America into blue and red, President Biden needs to reinforce the confidence of the public in restoring our nation’s prominence as a world class democracy for all Americans.
2. **Dealing with COVID-19:** President Biden will need to fast track his pandemic response once he takes office: ensuring vaccines are safe, effective, and distributed efficiently, equitably, and free. As part of this initiative, the president must begin working on a new coronavirus aid package and coordinate with state governors, mayors, and other local politicians.
3. **Reversing Trump’s corporate tax cut:** President Biden needs to raise corporate income taxes to 28% compared with the current 21% rate set by the GOP-led tax cuts of 2017. Also, this promise falls under Biden’s larger proposed tax plan, which stresses that Americans making less than \$400,000 would not pay more in taxes.
4. **Making the U.S. an international leader again on climate change:** President Biden needs to reenter the U.S. immediately into the landmark Paris Climate Accord of 2015.
5. **Making immigration changes:** President Biden needs to provide a pathway to citizenship for people commonly known as DREAMers who are part of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program.
6. **Foreign policy . . . repair alliances:** President Biden needs to repair the country’s broken foreign policy by reaching out to U.S. allies to re-establish our collaboration with them and with NATO.

Ken Forman, Lawrence Schools & SUNY Stony Brook

For me, the essential priority is to restore reality-based, factual communication with the American people. This needs to be coupled with action which demonstrates that our government’s primary purpose is to respond to the needs of its citizens.

Dealing with the COVID pandemic must be an immediate priority. It does seem that the administration is moving to improve the supply and distribution of vaccines, while not overlooking aspects of testing and tracking that will become even more vital as we face mutations in the virus. Unfortunately, there is no magic “reset” button. Overcoming the confusion and politicalization that characterized past efforts will not be easy and there will be occasional missteps. However, addressing mistrust of vaccines and the need for special efforts to insure equity in distribution to all segments of our population are essential.

NYSRSAS’ recent focus groups concentrated on two issues which I believe need to be additional priorities for the new administration. CTE (Career and Technical Education) is all about preparing for meaningful work that will provide economic stability and possible opportunities for advancement. This should be not only in the framework of K-12 programs but also for re-training workers, as industries will inevitably shift priorities in response to climate change as well as economic competition.

Similarly, our Black Lives Matter position paper recognized the need to honestly face social inequities that have negative impact, not just on people of color but on our society as a whole. The past four years have made me more aware of a simmering level of anger among those who feel mistreated or disrespected or powerless. On an individual level, I think we all need to try harder to understand where others are coming from — putting ourselves in their shoes. respecting their opinions (even if we can’t agree with them) and just treating each other as we want to be treated ourselves. I am heartened by the change in tone from our leadership. While I don’t expect that everything will suddenly be “peaches and cream,” I do have hope that a new “gentility” and mutual respect can contribute to smoothing our path forward.

Pat Galaskas, Syosset Schools

President Biden’s administration faces daunting tasks. The first 100 days have historically been the benchmark for judging a new presidency. It seems as if the challenges are so great that President Biden may need more time to *(cont’d on page 7)*

PRESIDENTIAL PRIORITIES
(cont'd from page 6)

meet the number of major crises which few new presidents have faced. The three issues which need to be addressed first are as follows:

1. Most would agree that bringing the coronavirus pandemic under control is vital. Vaccinating enough Americans as quickly as possible so a return to some sense of normalcy is crucial. Getting Americans to adhere to measures to stop the spread, such as wearing masks and social distancing, is also needed.
2. Economic assistance for businesses and individuals must be expanded. Previous efforts have helped, but more is needed so that the U.S. can recover as quickly as possible. President Obama's programs to meet the Great Recession were too modest and recovery lagged for years.
3. Restoring faith in the electoral process is essential. If Americans do not trust the way in which elections are held and votes are counted, our democracy could cease to exist. Having Americans understand and extol our democratic principles will be an immense challenge, but it is vital that it be done.

I look forward to President Biden's administration being able to meet these challenges.

John Wallace, Herricks School District

IN MEMORIUM

George "Holly" Whitacre (1935-2020)

A long-time member of NYSRSAS, Holly retired from the Smithtown Schools. His friends remember him as one who forged friendships wherever he went, and for his kind heart, gentle soul and love of life.

THANK YOU, JOE !

Joe Marchese has authored our newsletter column "Port City Ponderings" for many years. Regrettably, vision problems prevent him from continuing his column which delighted us with its interesting perspectives on local affairs and often little-known anecdotes and histories of American life. We thank Joe for his many years of service to NYSRSAS and wish him good health, happy years ahead and continued participation as a member of our organization.

WE NEED A MARSHALL PLAN . . .
(cont'd from page 8)

There are many local efforts. However, those efforts are simply not sustainable without federal support, with Covid-19 infection rates surging across the country.

The cost of this lifeline for schools — an estimated \$125 billion proposed by a variety of organizations — is less than 20 percent of the total earmarked for the Paycheck Protection Program and about twice the amount provided to airlines. That's a relatively small price to safely reopen the public schools that give millions of children a shot at the American Dream and their families the chance to get back to work.

Getting children back into their classrooms and helping them recover must be addressed by the federal government with the same urgency and commitment as other disasters! Failure to do so will allow a "national emergency" to become a national disgrace!

Kennth Forman, Ph.D, has had extensive experience as an administrator in various New York public school systems. He currently serves as an adjunct professor in the Educational Leadership program at Stony Brook University.



Quarterly Query
WINTER 2021



On January 6th, terrorists invaded the halls of Congress, protesting the confirmation of Joseph P. Biden, Jr. as the duly-elected President of the United States. Many Americans still question the election results and support Donald J. Trump's assertion that he was the winner.

I recently came across this quote, author unknown:
"A country has the government it deserves."

Do you agree? We would be interested in learning how our readers react to that statement.

Please send your thoughts to
clipsethuberman@gmail.com
(Kindly include your name and the district from which you retired.)

We hope to hear from you!

WE NEED A MARSHALL PLAN FOR SCHOOLS . . . AND WE NEED IT NOW

Ken Forman



President Biden has described the crisis in public schools caused by the pandemic as a “national emergency.” Our schools, like thousands more across the nation, need immediate help from the federal government. The challenges school communities face aren’t for lack of effort by principals, teachers, staff, parents and students. But the fact is that for many, if not most, children online and even hybrid education is less effective in comparison to what’s possible in a classroom led by a great teacher.

- In Los Angeles Unified, where almost 80 percent of students live in poverty and 82 percent are Latino and African American, D’s and F’s among high school students have increased about 15 percent compared with last year. Meanwhile, reading proficiency in elementary grades has fallen 10 percent.
- In Illinois, students have lost more than a year of math progress.
- In New York City, 82 percent of students are children of color, largely from communities that have been disproportionately impacted by the virus, suffering tremendous loss and trauma that accompanies kids into the classroom.
- Across the country, math performance on standardized tests lags the prior year by 5 to 10 percentile points.

I believe that it’s time to treat this dire situation

facing public school students with the same federal mobilization that would be expected for other national emergencies, such as floods, wildfires and hurricanes. A major, coordinated nationwide effort — **A Marshall Plan for Schools** — is needed to return children to public schools quickly in the safest way possible. Schools have shown that they can stay open safely despite community spread of the virus, but that demands the right set of actions and adequate financial support to bring students back safely and address the impact of this crisis. Direct federal support for schools must be specific and targeted!

A federal relief package for schools should cover a safe, healthy and welcoming school environment so that school leaders, teachers and students can focus exclusively on their mission: high-quality teaching and learning.

In my opinion, funds should be provided directly to public school districts for four essential programs:

- cleaning and sanitizing of facilities and providing protective equipment.
- school-based coronavirus testing and contact tracing to help reduce the risk for all in the school community.
- mental health support for students to address the significant trauma they are facing.
- funding for in-person instruction next summer to help students recover from learning losses because of the pandemic.

(continued on page 7)



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