

### **It's time for a new Centrist party in the spirit and practice of classical liberalism.**

The good news is that the Grifter has left the White House. His closest aides and high-profile abettors are scurrying away to avoid the infamy that they so richly deserve. The newly installed President is clearly a moderate fellow, empathetic and conciliatory. And, ironically, he is so old that he can have no other agenda than to fix the current situation. His Vice President is the embodiment of the American dream. While the country remains in severe national security peril during this period of transition, one of the worst political crises in our nation's history appears to be behind us.

The bad news is that our society remains profoundly divided. Even worse, the two main political parties are totally ill-equipped to serve the needs of what once was and must be again in the future a large consensus-based middle. Without that middle, our two-century "experiment" in classical liberalism will cease.

My primary circle of acquaintance will cringe, but it must be said: the new president's party is in no condition to save or serve that political middle. His party is disjointed, dominated by identity politics, and weighed down by plenty of its own toxic sub-groups and pieties. It is an amalgamation of grievance groups, unified only by opposition to the Grifter. While I enthusiastically voted for the party's slate in 2020, I did so to remove the Grifter from power, not because it had a coherent, broad-based policy program I wished to support. I believe many others of my political leanings voted for the new President for the same reason.

The situation on the other side of the aisle is far worse. The party's descent into pure tribalism started with several decades ago and has been fueled by a focus on a handful of highly divisive issues. It is now just a cult of personality, shattered by the demise of the cult leader. The echo chamber of dedicated traditional and social media has led to intentional mass delusion, if not psychosis, involving many millions of people who believe the unbelievable. That will take years to unwind. In the meantime, there are many more millions of policy moderates who still support the "party," though it does not exist as such. They have effectively been disenfranchised.

The room for a new centrist party is ample, for moderates of both parties, but in particular for, how shall I put it, conservative liberals and liberal conservatives. This group could have consensus positions on business regulation, taxes, immigration reform, climate change policy, multi-lateralism, etc. For almost all these issues, there is room in the middle. The Centrists do not have to agree on all policy points, but by necessity they have a much greater overlap than the current political groupings. And at the center of that Venn diagram is a core belief in the classical liberalism that emphasizes the rights of individuals, framed by the rule of law, and operating in reasonably regulated markets. Classical liberalism empowers individuals to achieve their full potential, and society benefits as a result. Whatever its shortcomings, that cartoon description of classical liberalism should hold greater appeal to former, current and future middle-class Americans than whatever passes for an agenda from the current parties.

The main objections to a third party in the American system are twofold and always the same. First, the primary system, the winner-take-all structure for most states, etc. lead inexorably to two-party dominance. In contrast, a weak parliamentary system like Italy or Israel has the opposite problem of too many parties and nothing gets done. All I can say is, I don't care. The current system is broken. The second objection is that one of the two main players will adopt any constructive idea advanced by a third party and thereby sap the energy of the new effort. That has been the case in the past, but may no longer be so. Both parties have become so polarized that they seem less likely to make room for fact-based centrist viewpoints ahead of their own extremisms. Also, the earlier third-party efforts were from one end of the political spectrum or the other. The two main parties were in the middle. Now that situation has been reversed. The need is in highly-populated, sensible middle, not for another extreme view. In any case, our political predicament is too severe to be constrained by what has or has not worked in the past.

Congratulations to the new President and Vice President. I wish them well. They may well be what the country needs right now. But what the country needs in 2024 is more choice. It's time to begin.