

STEVEN P. DINKIN A path forward

A VOTE TO RESTORE SOME HUMOR IN THE UNITED STATES

BY STEVEN P. DINKIN

A funny thing happened on the way to the Nov. 3 presidential election: Our country lost its sense of humor.

Recently wrote that the president's job one, post-election, is to restore trust in our institutions and each other. That mandate holds true whether the victor is President Donald Trump or former Vice President Joe Biden.

Along with restoring trust, I vote for a concerted effort to restore humor in the United States. It's time to Make America Laugh Again.

Humor humanizes. It's not only an important component in an emotionally healthy person, it's also essential for an emotionally healthy society. Used well, humor puts people at ease, helping us cope with life's challenges and absurdities. (These days, we have plenty of both.) The simple act of laughing puts us on common ground and

makes it easier to relate to each other. We become likable.

When you think about it, a sense of humor is not among Trump's many qualities. That may be why he was advised to tell a few jokes at Thursday's final presidential debate: to seem more relatable. And to become more likable. Trump didn't follow the advice.

One way we assess a person's sense of humor is their ability to be self-deprecating, to be comfortable laughing at themselves. This vulnerability makes us seem approachable and self-aware. And, the thinking goes, if you can laugh at yourself, you are better able to share humor with others.

As it turns out, Abraham Lincoln was renowned for his sense of humor. According to presidential historian Doris Kearns Goodwin, Lincoln — who suffered from profound melancholy — used humor to lighten his sadness. It was a decidedly unfunny period in our history: When Lincoln took office, more

than 620,000 soldiers were about to die in the Civil War, and the country was deeply divided.

Lincoln was a master at self-deprecation, famously remarking, "If I were two-faced, would I be wearing this one?" He was also a brilliant impressionist. So, despite serving as president at the darkest of times, Lincoln was rated No. 1 by GQ in their ranking of funniest presidents. Franklin Pierce, our 14th president, took last place. The ranking was published prior to the Trump presidency.

Franklin D. Roosevelt, our ninth-funniest president, took office at the height of the Great Depression and served the country during World War II. Every night, he hosted a cocktail party where talk about the war was strictly prohibited. Roosevelt also had a quick wit. One day, the first lady left the White House to visit a penitentiary. When Roosevelt asked where she had gone, he was told "to prison." "I'm not surprised," he responded. "But

what for?"

President Ronald Reagan used laugh lines to win over skeptics. On his way to the operating room after a 1981 assassination attempt, Reagan famously implored his doctors, "Please tell me you're all Republicans." The head surgeon, a Democrat, replied, "We're all Republicans today." (Reagan was rated No. 6 by GQ.)

Humor matters off-camera, too. Opinion writer David Litt noted in 'The New York Times that politicians use humor to identify, and ultimately to uphold, unwritten norms — skillfully stepping up to the line without crossing it. These are "benign violations" that make us laugh, said Litt, especially when rules are nearly broken.

I can't blame Trump for the humorlessness that clouds our country now. Nor can I blame the concept of political correctness, which has been around for decades. America's majority core rejects political correctness, seeing it as an

impediment to self-expression. And this feeling holds regardless of age or race.

I may be an outlier then, because humor that only works when civility is forsaken and inclusion is cast aside isn't really humorous to me.

But this much is clear: It may be easier to mend our country's funny bone when we're on the other side of the COVID-19 pandemic, and all this economic turmoil and social unrest is behind us. When that day comes, we'll have earned a hearty chuckle.

Lincoln, Roosevelt and Reagan each used humor as a leadership tool, even in times of peril. Today, our weary country needs to restore humor and learn to laugh again. And that's no joke.

Dinkin is president of the National Conflict Resolution Center, a San Diego-based group working to create solutions to challenging issues, including intolerance and incivility. To learn about NCRC's programming, visit ncrconline.com

50TH Polls show close race

FROM B1 polling and big fundraising figures for Issa and Campa-Najjar. He added that national Democrats and their congressional campaign arm also entered the race in September, further signaling the race was truly competitive.

"It is always hard to glean actual motivation from (federal campaign) filings, but you would probably think if Issa didn't feel the need to loan himself \$800,000, he wouldn't," Crawford said. "In a normal situation this should be a coast for a Republican candidate, so to me that is an indicator that shows this is not locked up. ... Both sides can see this as winnable."

Issa has previously said his campaign needed to

make up ground as far as fundraising because he entered the race late and endured a brutal — and costly — primary fight with fellow Republican Carl DeMaio.

The fundraising totals generated by Issa and Campa-Najjar are among the highest of any congressional candidate in San Diego County.

Issa also led the way in campaign spending during the first half of October, dropping more than \$1.6 million, including more than \$1.4 million on media buys, with the three largest purchases occurring on Oct. 5, Oct. 9 and Oct. 14.

Campa-Najjar's campaign was not far behind in spending, dropping more than \$1.1 million during the first two weeks of October. Most of those funds went to fundraising services, direct mail and media buys. Campa-Najjar spent almost \$800,000 from Oct. 1 to Oct. 14 on media and radio ad buys, with the three

Campaign contributions for congressional candidates

Donations raised and cash on hand for San Diego County candidates.

District		Amount raised*	Cash on hand
49	Mike Levin (D)	\$82,190	\$1,810,282
	Brian Maryott (R)	\$299,094	\$409,540
50	Ammar Campa-Najjar (D)	\$528,725	\$587,455
	Darrell Issa (R)	\$1,250,990	\$847,754
51	Juan Vargas (D)	\$54,486	\$158,930
	Juan Hidalgo (R)	\$7,027	-\$708
52	Scott Peters (D)	\$72,800	\$1,759,584
	Jim DeBello (R)	\$8,735	\$92,009
53	Sara Jacobs (D)	\$844,403	\$187,586
	Georgette Gómez (D)	\$71,315	\$226,762

*Amount raised/total receipts. Oct. 1, 2020 through Oct. 14, 2020.

Source: Federal Election Commission

largest purchases occurring Oct. 1, Oct. 2, and Oct. 5.

Voting is going on now. County officials have sent mail vote ballots to all reg-

istered voters. If a voter hasn't received a mail ballot by now, they should con-

MICHELLE GILCHRIST U-T

MAYOR He's known for love of city

FROM B1 Arapostathis is still trying to reconcile the events that occurred that May weekend with the place he's always called home, where he played football in high school, volunteered on city commissions and eventually won election as mayor in 2014, soundly defeating long-time Mayor Art Madrid.

He said he watched in horror the night of May 30 and early morning of May 31 as his bank and two other buildings burned, and as looters smashed store windows throughout the city, stealing jewelry, sporting goods, electronic items, snack foods and hair products.

"I was crushed," he said. "My heart was absolutely crushed because this is the city that I grew up in, that I feel is part of me. It was as if a part of my body was being burned and being damaged, and it was something I knew would never fully grow back. It's going to be something that I live with and that everyone in the city of La Mesa is going to live with for the rest of their lives. It was incredibly difficult to watch. I'm a resident here, too, and I was going through the same type of emotions as everyone else."

Arapostathis said the City Council met at 11 p.m. Saturday, May 30, at the La Mesa Community Center to discuss the situation. Two hours later, Greg Humora — six months into his new role

as city manager and acting director of emergency and disaster for the city — ordered a curfew from 1:30 a.m. until 7 a.m. Sunday, May 31.

Other curfews followed as the city tried to repair the damage, boarding up broken windows that later became canvases for local artists who painted flowers, rainbows and words of healing.

Some in the city have criticized the City Council for not acting more swiftly and forcefully to put an end to the chaos. "No one had anticipated for this event to turn the way that it did," Arapostathis said. "At 5 p.m., we didn't fully realize what was going to happen later in the evening."

"I'm not a police officer and I'm not going to pretend to be one, so for me to speculate on what could have been done, I can't," he said. "I do understand why people are speculating, but until you are the person that has command and control, you really don't know what else could be done. I talked to someone who was angry the buildings burned down. I said, 'I'm angry, too. I have questions, too.'"

Arapostathis said firefighters were unable to respond to the arson because a state policy says "that unless the team of firefighters can be protected, they can't be dispatched to a situation where there are hundreds of rioters, and we only had so many uniformed officers that night that could ensure their safety."

In the weeks following the mayhem, the mayor appeared visibly shaken and struggled to find words. His council colleagues quietly

expressed concern for his emotional state.

City Councilman Bill Baber said he knows the events have deeply affected Arapostathis — or "Mr. La Mesa," as Baber calls him.

"Mark is incredibly empathetic," Baber said. "And Mark loves La Mesa. He feels La Mesa in his bones and all of it hurts him — the complaints, the bitterness, the riots, the racial strife. It's been a tough year for all of us. It hurts us all, but it has hurt no one more than Mark."

"He was overwhelmed, disheartened, tired and angry, and really, we all were," Baber said. "He was rattled because La Mesa was rattled. People in the community questioned his ability, and he received endless amounts of unfair criticism, and he took it to heart. He was like the embodiment of all that pain — and while we were all rattled, it particularly got to him."

"It was like a death in his family to have La Mesa wounded like that. He wasn't the same. And somebody might look at that as a weakness, but it was all real and it was true. He is a person who cares, who has empathy and who feels the pain of an entire city."

Several business owners in the city said they are frustrated that more wasn't done to protect them during the rioting, but they don't fault the mayor or police department. One business owner in the city for nearly four decades said she is disappointed at the lack of concern by the city in the aftermath of COVID-19 and then the rioting.

"Nobody from the city has approached me for

months," said Deanne Ross, who owns a clothing store in downtown La Mesa. "Nobody has checked on me, not even a phone call to see how we're doing. It's like they hid. I feel like there's outreach they can do. As an elected official, I feel like (Arapostathis) should act like a mayor and show some leadership."

Brenda Leek, who owns a restaurant downtown, said the city's lack of communication has been anything but reassuring in the middle of a pandemic. She said she has told Arapostathis "to his face that I'm disappointed with the lack of concern I feel he has with businesses."

"It's kind of a shame," she said. "I respect the energy and efforts he has given in the past, but the year 2020 he has been MIA."

Among the accusations made against him, Arapostathis said one of the most frustrating is people's belief that he ordered the La Mesa Police Department to "stand down," allowing the mayhem to continue unabated, which he said "is completely erroneous." A timeline provided by the city noted that the San Diego County Sheriff's deputies took over command control later in the evening.

Then-Police Chief Walt Vasquez — who would later announce his retirement — on several occasions denied that there had been any direction from the mayor or city manager for public safety members to stand down.

Arapostathis said he is still trying to dispel rumors that police officers were taken off duty to personally guard him, and explained that while public safety offi-

cers did check on the safety of all City Council members during the night's events, that was the extent of it.

"I wasn't in contact with the police chief," he said. "Never was I ever one-on-one with the police chief. I was not on the phone. I was never at the police station monitoring the situation ordering people what to do."

Because La Mesa is a California "General Law" city, mayors and council members "have all of the responsibility but have none of the authority" where the police department's activity is concerned, Arapostathis explained. In a General Law city, the city manager has the authority to hire and fire a police chief; the City Council hires and can fire the city manager. The city manager, however, does not have the authority to tell the police department what to do; that responsibility of making the calls on public safety falls on the chief of police.

In June, the police department provided a timeline and accompanying incident account of the weekend's activities. Since then, the city has hired an outside firm to provide an "after-action report" of the demonstration and destruction, and to look into what happened leading to the protest and related events that happened afterward.

Arapostathis said he answered as many emails and texts as he could.

"I had the same questions and I know that they were puzzled, because I'm the mayor and they feel that I have total control of every situation that occurs in the city of La Mesa, especially something of this magni-

tude," Arapostathis said. "And I don't. And it's hard to say that it was out of control and that it was beyond what we could handle."

Arapostathis said he left social media in June, discouraged by the calls for his resignation and the death threats.

"What was most troubling to me is when I saw people that disagreed on small issues with people that had been their friends, and they wanted to destroy that person," he said. "Because the pandemic closed schools, he's been unable to take refuge at his favorite place, his theater room. As he walked around an eerily quiet campus earlier last week, Arapostathis said he misses the flurry of activity, even the lines for the bathroom."

"Mark is a home-grown person who loves this town and has for more than 50 years," said Beth Thomas, principal at La Mesa Arts Academy and a longtime colleague. "Everybody loves him. He was devastated by the impact (of the riots) on this town."

In an act of solidarity, Thomas and other colleagues arranged for a surprise drive-by parade for Arapostathis in June. While he was with Thomas at the campus, dozens of cars drove by honking their horns, thrusting up signs and shouting words of support. People parked their cars and went up to visit him, socially distanced and with masks, Thomas said.

"He sobbed for 90 minutes," she said.

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SMOLENS

FROM B1 safety guidelines.

Fauci did not endorse that agreement and suggested he may still recommend a national lockdown if things got "really, really bad."

The shutdown vs. open portion of the interview was overshadowed by Fauci's comment that he was "absolutely not" surprised President Donald Trump had contracted COVID-19, given the lack of mask-wearing and distancing among people around Trump.

And all that was subsided by Trump subsequently lashing out at Fauci, calling him a "disaster" in a campaign phone call with staff and saying "people are tired of hearing Fauci and all these idiots ..."

Trump has long chafed at Fauci's criticism of the

administration's efforts to address the pandemic. As of Friday, the United States had recorded more than 8.4 million cases and 223,000 deaths due to COVID-19, according to John Hopkins University Coronavirus Resource Center.

The current surge is mostly being felt in Midwestern and Southern states, many of which have said their hospitals are being strained by the influx of COVID-19 patients.

By comparison, California appears relatively stable. Several health experts have credited Gov. Gavin Newsom's new tiered system that ranks the severity of the spread in counties, along with a greater willingness among Californians to wear masks and social distance than their counterparts in some other states.

That may be, but state and local officials in California say too many people

are still flouting coronavirus protocols.

Hospitalizations have risen in more than 40 states, while California saw its coronavirus hospitalizations fall for 12 consecutive weeks, according to the Los Angeles Times last week.

In early September, Newsom urged caution as more businesses and schools were reopening, citing a statistical model that projected an 89 percent increase in hospitalizations in the state during the following month, the Associated Press reported.

That didn't happen, and while that has been cause for relief, no one is celebrating. The state is approaching 1 million confirmed cases (877,600 as of Thursday) and has surpassed 17,000 deaths.

San Diego County continues to struggle overall, though during the week of

Oct. 12-18, the county recorded its lowest number of new hospital admissions since the beginning of the pandemic. Despite some fluctuations, San Diego's hospitalization numbers have been trending down since July.

A key goal in fighting the pandemic is making sure there's adequate hospital capacity to deal with a surge in cases. Since the beginning, San Diego County has been successful on that front.

But the county recorded 47 community outbreaks from Oct. 7 through Oct. 14, which The San Diego Union-Tribune's Paul Sisson noted was the largest weekly total to appear in local public health reports since the pandemic began in March.

A community outbreak is defined as three or more cases from different households who visited the same location in the same 14-day

window. Sisson wrote that "outbreaks serve as a barometer of the public's overall adherence to the mask-wearing and social-distancing rules that have so far controlled the virus's spread."

As of Friday, the county had reported 53,928 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 867 deaths.

Cases and community outbreaks have been trending in the wrong direction, which health officials attribute in part to the public becoming lax about taking precautions. That's not just a local concern.

"People are tired of it and yet the virus is not tired of us," Dr. Francis Collins, director of the National Institutes of Health, told National Public Radio.

That's worrisome. Experts express concern an even stronger resurgence of the virus is ahead, especially as people yearn to gather for

Halloween, Thanksgiving and the winter holidays — when the weather will keep them indoors even more.

Officials from Dr. Wilma Wooten, the county public health officer, to Dr. Fauci say the potential fall-winter coronavirus spread can be lessened by heeding guidelines they've touted for months: avoid crowds, keep gatherings small and outdoors when possible, continue to social distance, and wear a mask.

Still, many experts fear what we've heard before: It's likely to get worse before it gets better.

Tweet of the Week

Goes to Lauren Peikoff (@laurenpeikoff), executive producer at MSNBC. "Your Tuesday reminder that Twitter is not America."

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