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QUOTE FOR THE DAY

“I will be a president for all Americans. I will fight as hard for those who did not support me as for those who did.” President Biden.

THE GREAT UNIFIER – YES OR NO?

No debate about the inauguration, it was beautiful and hit all the right notes, and has been lauded by Democrats and Republicans alike. From Lady Gaga’s incredible rendition of the National Anthem to Amanda Gorman’s reading of her poem, “The Hill We Climb”, to the president’s reassuring inaugural speech emphasizing inclusion and unity – just a beautifully orchestrated event. For the expression of ideals and aspirations the president gets an A+. For substance, he gets an “incomplete” – not that anything untoward has

occurred, but that everything articulated needs to be tested in the crucible, that is America and the world, after inauguration day.

WHERE IDEALISM MEETS REALITY AND THE RUBBER MEETS THE ROAD

Liberal columnist, Paul Krugman, points out, “Unity is a fine goal, but don’t expect much cooperation.” Just think about that statement for a minute – sounds like his side has all the rational, unifying ideas and it’s up to the other side to cooperate.

Moderate columnist, Davis Brooks, has a take on the liberal idealists “...we have elite universities that have become engines for the production of inequality. All that woke posturing is the professoriate’s attempt to mask the fact that they work at finishing schools where more students come from the top one percent of earners than from the bottom sixty percent. Their graduates flock to insular neighborhoods in and around New York, D.C., San Francisco and a few other cities, have little contact with the rest of America and make everyone else feel scorned and

invisible.” Wow! There’s an optimistic start on unification.

After a quick inaugural lunch, the new president is off to the Oval Office to sign off on 17 executive actions that largely undo executive actions taken by former president Trump. No need to review all of these as many won’t cause the opposition much angst.

Two reversals of interest are the decisions to rejoin the World Health Organization and the Paris Climate Accord. Former president Trump had every good reason to withdraw from these organizations. The WHO has been screwed up for many years, dragged their feet on the pandemic investigation and has obviously favored China in their actions. BUT, as I pointed out in an earlier issue, the WHO is a critical central focus for health information and action around the world. For all its faults, we really cannot afford not to be a participant. Same thing with the Paris Climate Accord – good reasons for us to have stepped aside- did little for us while many other countries had favorable easier conditions of membership. BUT, in the critical arena of Climate dangers, it

just looks so bad for the U.S. not to be a participant in such a highly visible enterprise.

Then, president Biden's call to find a pathway to citizenship for the, "dreamers", those children who were brought illegally into the states years ago by their parents (not to be confused with the proposal to establish a path to citizenship for 11 million illegal aliens). It's hard to argue against the plight of the "dreamers" - hoping this does not become a major topic of contention.

Cancelling construction of the Keystone XL pipeline - no harmony there. Heated opinions on both sides of the aisle to say nothing about outright anger from the Canadians who have counted heavily on this project, which has already stopped and started so many times no one can count anymore. So now it goes on the back burner again until the Republicans gain a couple of more Senate seats or retake the Congress.

Another executive order defunds further work on the wall between the U.S. and Mexico - never been a wall fan myself, but millions of

Trump supporters are – the very people president Biden says he wants to represent. He is going to have to demonstrate, and quickly, how his idea for increased surveillance (drones, cameras, planes and additional patrols) will satisfactorily secure the unwalled portions of our border.

Oh, and here’s one other order – all executive branch employees must sign pledges to “act in the interests of the American people and not for personal gain.” Well, Hunter Biden is not in the executive branch, but influence peddling off his father’s name is not an investigation that is going to go away, but will be largely muted by Democratic control of the Senate.

The whole concept of unity and cooperation will be severely tested as the president tries to move forward with his plan for an eight year path for citizenship for eleven million illegal immigrants. If you think the Republicans are angry, what about the scores of millions of immigrants, either now citizens, or about to become citizens, who have followed the law?

Next, we have the size of the stimulus bill – hard to argue about the size of the economic relief for individuals and companies through the Pay Check Protection Plan, but the Republicans are on the war- path about what they refer to as a “bail out” for the large blue states. Their contention is that these states, New York, California and Illinois, among others, have been fiscally mismanaged for years with underfunded pension funds and bloated government structures. Now, with dramatically reduced tax revenues due to the pandemic, these states are desperately seeking federal help – not much sympathy coming from the Republicans – no unity there.

Peter Baker, is the chief NY Times correspondent for the White house and has interesting observations as to why Republicans and Democrats can't unite on the meaning of unity. He points out, “In Mr. Biden's opening hours, the outreach was more about words and symbols than tangible actions.... His first two days in office were aimed at reversing Mr. Trump's policies and enacting liberal ideas, not finding common ground. He has offered no examples of Republican priorities

he was willing to adopt in the interest of bipartisan cooperation nor describing what compromises would be acceptable to win congressional approval of his initiatives.”

Alyssa Farah, Trump’s last White House communication director states, Biden’s policies so far are aimed at only half the country, those who supported him, with no sign of outreach to those who did not.”

Josh Holmes, a Republican strategist says, “Bipartisanship isn’t tone, it’s policy. I think he (Biden) figured out the tone. But that’s not unity. If you’re nicely doing radically partisan things, unity is not sure to follow.”

ANY UNITY IN SIGHT AT THE SENATE ?

Don’t hold your breath on this one. Columnist, Nicholas Fandos notes that just 24 hours ago Republican house and Senate leaders were extending warm congratulations to their opponents only to quickly retreat to their partisan corners.

Even though Senator Schumer takes over the Senate, which, with VP Harris, has a tie breaking vote, the Republicans still have negotiating leverage, and Senator McConnell is trying to secure a promise from Senator Schumer that he will not eliminate the filibuster which effectively imposes a 60 vote threshold to advance legislation. According to Fandos, Progressives favor getting rid of the filibuster to allow them to bypass the Republicans altogether and win crucial pieces of Mr. Biden's agenda. Centrists caution that scrapping the rule could quickly backfire if their party loses Senate control in the next election.

Added to all of this is the overhang of the upcoming Senate impeachment trial of Mr. Trump, which is certain to reignite partisan enmities. The common thread that runs through all this commentary is that while the language may be of a more civil tone than that of the Trump era, unity is more than just a word, it is also a figment of the imagination.

Your faithful scribe, PB

