



One country, one people, one government

Let's expect more from our politicians—and each other.

By Leah Curtin, RN, ScD(h), FAAN

To develop national answers to serious questions, we must work together as fellow Americans with different perspectives and approaches to the same problems.

BY THE TIME this article is published, the holidays will be over, and it will be time to inaugurate a new president. Once upon a time, the new president—whether a Republican or a Democrat—made a nonpartisan inauguration speech. For the most part, they talked about what it means to be an American. Not a Republican or a Democrat, an American. One country. One people. One government. Republican and Democrat making all of us safe, all of us one.

How did that happen?

Most of us were raised on the “golden rule”: Do unto others what we would want done unto ourselves. It's a good and a clear standard for a democracy of differences. Now, our “values” seem to be personal freedom, personal independence, and “my civil rights.” And in the middle of a pandemic that means nurses and doctors are worked beyond exhaustion.

America itself never really wins anymore; political parties win—or lose. A set of political persuasions that insist “it's my way or the highway.”

In years past, we held to the golden rule, which seemed to give us process, civility, and balance. In the (hopefully temporary) absence of this grand old value, I propose a restatement of what we the people should expect from our politicians (and one another):

- **Being president does not make a person God.** This also forbids idolatry, even of the self. No narcissists allowed.
- **Civil discourse and human respect are the underpinnings of democracy.** When we destroy as a people what we say we value as a people by mocking, deriding, or dividing one American from another, we lay a curse that will destroy us all.
- **Keep being ‘presidential’ as a symbol of the republic.** If we reduce the quality of the presidency to the level of entertainment, we substitute celebrity for genuine leadership.
- **Honor both sides of the aisle—Republican and Democrat.** To develop national

answers to serious questions, we must work together as fellow Americans with different perspectives and approaches to the same problems.

- **Thou shalt not kill the American spirit of inclusion.** The U.S. Congress was created to bring order, reflection, and compromise between political forces, not to create situations in which one side wins and the other loses.
 - **Thus, thou shalt not practice sexism, racism, xenophobia, or global exclusion.** In an intercultural world, what counts is what we have in common, not how we differ.
 - **Thou shalt not steal from the poor to give to the rich nationally or globally.** Real democracy demands just and decent distribution of the basics of life. In the end, it's the only thing that will strengthen our country.
 - **Thou shalt not lie in tweets, advertisements, or administrative and congressional speeches.** It is the highest treason done for the sake of the shortest ever triumph.
 - **Thou shalt not insult thy neighbor.** The purpose of politics is to give all voices and insights a chance to be heard. To aim insults at another, especially a public servant, only loosens the bonds between us.
 - **Thou shalt not take for yourself what rightfully belongs to the other.** Embezzlement, lying, fraud, tax evasion, and vandalism are all wrong. No exceptions.
- From where I stand, it seems that the golden rule was so much simpler. At least we were less likely to hear the crude, rude, and lewd comments that have become part and parcel of our political language.

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