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Letters to the Editor

'Raise ourselves back up'

Dear Editor:

As anyone who has seen the latest presidential debate knows, our country is divided as never before. It seems as though the two political parties have drawn lines in the sand, and turned their backs on each other, completely unwilling to listen or negotiate in good faith with the other side. The left justifiably blames the preposterous blowhard we currently have as our nation's president, while the right is equally justified in blaming the radicalization of the left's policies. There just seems to be no common ground anymore, and Tuesday (Sept. 29) night's debate was a manifestation of that growing divide. Neither party was willing to be civil and respectful of the other from the outset, and if anyone managed to watch the debate the whole way through, it was an utter disgrace and a black eye to our nation.

Despite the new household phrase, "if you disagree with this, unfriend me", our diversity is and always has been our strength. We live in an age where diversity is celebrated and encouraged, at least the racial and ethnic kind. Few people would feel uncomfortable sitting down and eating lunch with, working with, or being neighbors with a person of another race or nationality. Instead, the new dividing line today is ideological hatred.

According to Arthur C. Brooks in his book "Love Your Enemies", "Most people assiduously avoid those who hold different moral values," and that the "starkest dividing line in America today is not race, religion or economic status, but rather party affiliation." (p. 104) Experience shows this to be true.

If we are to believe the media, there just doesn't seem to be much hope for our nation's future. But that is just not true. The power of our nation has always rested with "We the People," and not in a single man or woman leading us. You and I have little to no control over the national news cycle.

In many ways we are helpless to the events that are unfolding, but we cannot and should not sit idly by hoping for things to get better. Instead, we need to get involved with our families, our communities, and our local governments. We need to speak to our neighbors and friends in person when possible, so we can remember each other's humanity. The stark dividing lines we see quickly break down when we have a conversation with, share our stories, and celebrate our humanity together.

America is ready for unifying leadership at all levels of government, in every industry, and at every church and social club. Unifying leadership does not mean trying to placate others or avoid conflict altogether. It means treating others with respect, and managing conflict in a way that is not destructive. If we just lift where we stand, we can raise ourselves back up from this divided darkness. Our future is as bright as it has ever been, if we can just believe in ourselves and our fellow man.

**Jarom Smith
Olpe**

A flag for all views

Liberty is easy to take for granted when it is as foundationally available as it is in America.

It seems like some folks on the political left tend to forget this, with their threats of leaving the country if President Trump gets re-elected. But honestly, the anti-Trump zealots should be flying the American flag higher and more boldly than anyone.

We live in a country where ideological opponents of a sitting President, no matter the party, can not only criticize the government in general, we can project seething hatred and direct accusation on the President and any government official in as public a manner as we desire.

Our Constitutional right of free speech, even when deployed against our nation's top leaders, is not so generously available everywhere.

Chinese Communist leader Xi Jinping is facing growing dissent as he takes the country down a more authoritarian path. Xi's advancing consolidation of power is historically and currently the norm for communist and socialist countries - see any news stories on North Korea, Venezu-

ela and China's treatment of Hong Kong.

Ren Zhiqiang, a member of the Chinese Communist elite, who probably thought he had some level of protection to speak out against the government because of his position, learned first-hand how the ability to chastise the government like we do in America, is not a universal right.

According to a Sept. 22 article in the Washington Post by Eva Dou, Ren was sentenced to 18 years in prison and fined about \$619,000 for corruption and bribery. Any understanding of the power structure and politics in China would show graft (corruption and bribery) as a common (Dou calls it "endemic") element of society in communist China. So it is believed political retribution drove the arrest and sentence, rather than graft, likely done to send a warning message to other party members to know their place.

Ren's affront? He is widely believed to have written an essay criticizing Xi's response to the coronavirus outbreak, calling it a "crisis of governance."

Not a Facebook post saying he hopes the president dies. Not a protest that turned into a looted, flaming building.

An essay. About a virus, the spread of which has led to an international pandemic, mass death and economic devastation.

Ren was "one of the last openly critical public intellectuals in China," said Nis Grünberg, a researcher at the Mercator Institute for China Studies in Berlin. But his voice has now been muzzled.

Essayists use allegory and innuendo to question the government. Surely, the handling of the containment of the disease would be worthy of critical review? Not in China.

As the political left tosses around the idea of democratic socialism, they should consider the potential outcomes of what that system of government carries, by looking at socialist countries throughout history as case studies. Pay attention to what happens to people like Ren Zhiqiang when they try to speak out in a country that doesn't allow those fundamental freedoms.

Instead of threatening to leave the country, maybe irate Americans should remember the foundational opportunities for their interests and ideas in the United States, where the American flag serves as a shield for independent thought.

Rather than kneeling during a National Anthem, the most provocative and dissenting Americans on the left should be waving our country's flag with fierce pride, grateful for the freedoms our country affords them.

Celebrating return to play during National High School Activities Month

Karissa Niehoff, Executive Director of the National Federation of State High School Associations and Bill Fafflick, Executive Director of the Kansas State High School Activities Association.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused everyone to hit the pause button on life. During the stoppage and forced time away from routines, many people have come to appreciate the important things in life - family, friends and faith among others.

Still, the loss of some routines and regular activities hurt worse than others, namely last spring when high school sports and performing arts were shut down. Millions of students, coaches, parents and fans quickly began to realize the privilege of involvement in these education-based programs in schools.

Now, slowly but surely, high school

sports and performing arts are on their way back into schools in Kansas and across the country. While things are different - with social distancing, universal masking protocols in place - there is a resounding feeling of thankfulness that some degree of normalcy is returning.

As a result, this year's celebration of National High School Activities Month will be like none other in the 40-year history of the event. Since 1980, the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) and its member state associations have promoted the values of high school activity programs during the month of October, but this year will be extra special.

Kicking off the month-long focus Oct. 4-10 is National Sportsmanship, Fan Appreciation and Public-Address Announcers Week.

Hopefully, one of the silver linings of the

pandemic is that parents and other fans are more grateful for any opportunity to attend contests this year and positively support student participants. At this time last year, there were numerous incidents of inappropriate adult behavior at high school events - mostly directed at officials.

This year, in addition to being respectful of officials, being a good fan involves supporting participants by social distancing and wearing a mask. Attending a high school contest is even more of a privilege, and players, coaches and officials need positive and encouraging support.

The week of Oct. 11-17 is National Performing Arts Activities and Local State High School Associations Week.

More than four million high school

See **Activities**, Page 5

Sales tax order helps state

OK, there weren't parades or bells ringing on Oct. 1, the one-year anniversary of Kansas Secretary of Revenue Mark

At the Rail Burghart's decision that out-of-state sellers of goods into Kansas need to register with the state and pay sales taxes on items that we order online or over the phone and have delivered to us here in Kansas.

Nope, didn't hear a single bell or whistle, but that sales tax registration and payment have made the state tens of millions of dollars on previously tax-free sales. Some of that money went into the state treasury, some went into the bank accounts of cities and counties with local sales taxes.

Oh, and even if you don't track how much sales tax revenue (they call it "compensating use tax" for some obscure reason) that Burghart brought into the state, it has the effect of boosting Kansas small businesses which collect sales tax on everything you carry out of the store.

Those previously un-salable purchases from out of state essentially cut the price you paid when you bought a shirt or shoes or ... whatever ... from an out-of-state merchant, who shipped it to you without a sales tax.

Buy that shirt in Kansas, and you pay sales taxes ranging from just the 6.5 percent state tax to as much as 10.6 percent state/local total sales tax in Shawnee Mission. That's a pretty big price boost and it's what sent many Kansans to the Internet instead of downtown to make their purchases ...

That out-of-state sales tax collection essentially evened-up prices, removing a price advantage for out-of-state merchants while the local stores saw their sales shrink. It's a good thing for the locals, evening-up the prices so that they can be competitive not just for the price of goods sold, but at the bottom of the ticket when the sales taxes are added in.

Oh, yes, there was that little scrap last year, when at the request of some conservative legislators Attorney General Derek Schmidt said in an official opinion that he believed that Burkhart didn't have specific authority to make those out-of-state sellers register with Kansas and collect and remit back to the state those sales taxes. That 18-page opinion didn't go anywhere. Burkhart didn't think up anything new, he just started actively enforcing the state law on sales tax.

The Legislature didn't revoke the authority of Burkhart to actually enforce the law that had been on the books for decades and, last session, there weren't many lawmakers who during the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic were interested in reducing state revenues.

Now, we don't know the full year's effect of that "compensating use tax" on the state budget, but there's talk in the \$50 million or higher range for the state, and some smaller amount for those local sales taxes. We're waiting for Revenue folks to total it up on Nov. 1, when the first 12 months of payments are calculated.

Practically, this year some of those Internet or over-the-phone purchases by Kansans were sparked by the pandemic, when some local "nonessential" stores were closed by the governor. And when that went away, there are still Kansans who don't want to shop in crowded stores for fear of picking up the virus. But out-of-state purchases by Kansans have increased and that's a good reason that the compensating use tax is bringing money into the state.

What's the future of that Burkhart order? Well, we're coming into a year when state revenues for a whole lot of reasons are likely to be lower than planned for, and there are going to be bills for the state to pay.

We'll see just what Burkhart's order did to get those bills paid, won't we?

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