

Community Comment
July Fourth, 2014
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A Nation's Birthday

We are lucky enough, or blessed enough, or have nurtured enough over two hundred years to celebrate another birthday in this unique country of ours. With all the issues we have, and they are many, we still are the envy of the world in many ways and are looked to for help and leadership. We are still at war way too often, we still have economic issues, we still haven't got education right and we still fight poverty.

When we launched into the 21st century, I was hopeful we would appreciate a new perspective. But 911 intervened and the new century took an ugly turn and some state of conflict seems to be the new normal. That is not acceptable. While we cannot and maybe should not control what happens everywhere, we must do better at home. Some say we are witnessing the end of American exceptionalism. Maybe, but I am more optimistic.

As is almost always the case, the real danger lies from within. We are a country rooted in a brilliantly conceived constitution. From that, we have crafted laws that we can govern by. When these laws needed to change, we had the appropriate debates and changed them. Through the years, the American people have valued the social contract we have made to be respectful of these laws even when we disagreed with them. We have, more often than not, made the changes we wanted at the ballot box, not in the streets with guns. Most importantly, we have lived by majority rule and respected the decision of elections.

We have three players in our system of government that should supply some balance. At times, any one of these has been out of step with the majority of people or the times we live in. We have survived these trials but some have left our country poorer for the experience. We have as a people the ability to change congress every two or six years and the Presidency, every four years. But the Supreme Court members are there for life. Every election has consequences and this is most notable with the ability of the President to appoint Supreme court members. They need congressional consent and we hope they rise to the challenge. The challenge is that they work for us and interpret the constitution with diligence and without political agenda.

This week, America witnessed the worst kind of Supreme Court activism. The case of Hobby Lobby has many things that are troublesome. The first is the idea that laws should be fair and be able to be applied to all. This decision that Hobby Lobby can pick and choose what laws it agrees with is ridiculous on its face. We all have laws we think are not for us. But we work to change them or respect the will of the majority. This opens up a flood gate of Christian requests for exemptions. Then there is the fact that this is a corporation and is protected from some liability at the pleasure of the state. As such, it

needs to follow the law or lose its corporate shield. This decision makes me fear for America. We are a secular country. It's one big reason for our success. This is not a slippery slope; it's a cliff. On our birthday, we need to think about why America works for all of us. Happy Fourth; this birthday is sponsored by our veterans.

This has been Sam Pennisif or community comment.