

COMMENTARY

Always leave them with hope

By Lee Hamilton

Many years ago, I was in the audience when the Rev. Jesse Jackson, the legendary civil rights activist and election mobilizer, gave a speech. He often used the catchphrase, “Keep hope alive!” when he spoke, and he did so that time. The audience picked it up as a chant. “Keep hope alive!” they called. “Keep hope alive!” It was a memorable bit of political showmanship.



Lee H. Hamilton

A few years later, I gave a speech at a small college in Iowa. I used it to analyze all the challenges our country faced, domestic and foreign, and finished thinking I’d done a pretty good job of laying out our problems. Afterward, a young student came up to me. “That was a marvelous speech, Congressman,” she said. “I’ve just got one question: Is there any hope?”

I realized then that, far from rising to the occasion, I’d failed. Jesse Jackson was right: You always have to leave your listeners with hope, and I had not done that. This is very hard to pull off, of course – possibly harder now than it was then. We face a long list of seemingly intractable problems, from climate change to mass shootings to threats to our democratic processes to overseas rivals willing to test us at every turn. It’s easy to get discouraged and to believe that we cannot solve or manage those problems—and then to give in to despair. But Jackson and that student were right. We constantly need reminding that we can change things for the better. The reason, actually, is

straightforward. The backbone of our system of representative democracy is its faith in ordinary Americans to step up to their responsibility as citizens to improve their corner of the world – by their own direct actions as well as by making discriminating judgments about politicians and policies. If you rob people of hope, then you rob them of a reason to be involved.

In decades of talking to people all over the country, I’ve been repeatedly impressed by the strength of citizens’ desire to improve their communities. This often reflected itself in specific projects – a bridge or a road or renovations to a local school – but it also applied to supporting quality leaders who could get things done for their communities.

To be sure, people were often wary of politics: they thought it was filled with messiness and noise. But at the end of the day, they saw the need for deal-making, compromise, and negotiation. I think this is still true for the majority of Americans, though an alarming number these days want to elect political leaders who will brook no compromise—and, indeed, seem to take an almost punitive approach to fellow citizens and politicians who disagree with them. They want to extinguish hope.

Still, I believe that most Americans are solidly pragmatic. They recognize the complexities of the challenges we face, see the limitations on what can be accomplished at any given moment, and believe that even in the face of division there’s much that unites us, especially the urge to improve our own lives and those of our neighbors and fellow community members. They’re very aware of differences of opinion and operate out of a basic sense of decency and fair-

ness—they want the process to reflect fairly where people stand. I think that, without articulating it, they understand instinctively that keeping the process fair is crucial to keeping hope alive.

I’ve worked in this system a long time, and I believe it can do just that – if it’s allowed to work, and if citizens are allowed to fulfill the basic responsibility of being involved. That’s why the hope of changing things for the better is so crucial. We may face serious, difficult problems, but if we allow ourselves to become discouraged – or even worse, to be discouraged from tackling them – then progress really will be impossible.

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One Moment, Please... Young people in the workforce

By Jason Sethre
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Every once in a while, I hear someone around my age or older say, “I’m worried about these young people and their work ethic these days.”



Jason Sethre

They are talking about the next generation of teenagers.

The problem is that all of these “young people” seem to be lumped into the same category. People think they are lazy, which is not necessarily true.

I know of a ton teenagers who entered the workforce as soon as they could legally start working (age 14). They are washing dishes, bussing tables, waiting on tables, working on farms, mowing lawns, and a whole bunch of other jobs that need to be done. Quite often, they are doing the jobs that nobody else wants to do. And, this is a good thing. They need to learn the ropes.

These kids are so lucky, because they are learning how to interact with people on the job – both coworkers and customers. They are learning how to work together as a team to accomplish something. And, they are rewarded with compensation, so they can learn the value of a dollar. Along the way, they are building skills to become self-sustaining some day.

Of course, we need their help. If you talk to any employer in our

region, they will take all of the help they can get. We need more young people entering the workforce as soon as they are able.

Unfortunately, we do have some very capable young people not in the workforce. They are playing video games or just hanging out and bumming money off of their parents.

I have many thoughts on this perception we older folks need to think about.

First off, if any of us think that young people are lazy, then we need to blame ourselves. Our generation is responsible for raising them to become who they are today.

But more importantly, we need to focus on the positive. What about all of the young people who are working?

Instead of lumping all of these young people into the “lazy” category, let’s consider a different approach. Let’s praise all of the young people who are working. When you are at a restaurant, recognize these young people for stepping up as they are clearing a table of dirty dishes. If they are waiting tables, tip them well. Your praise will make their day a little brighter.

Young people in the workforce should give us a sign of hope for the future.

Every time we encounter a young person on the job, that presents an opportunity to encourage our next generation to keep the economy going.

We have an opportunity to make somebody’s day every day. Today could be that day.

Correction

An article on page 19 of the July 11, 2022, issue of the *Fillmore County Journal*, titled “Wednesdays are fun in Spring Valley” incorrectly stated that the events are coordinated by the EDA. The article should have stated, “The events are coordinated by the Spring Valley Business Alliance.” We apologize for the error.

Government this Week

Monday, July 18

- Rushford-Peterson School Board, Forum Room, 6 p.m.
- Caledonia School Board, High School Room A154, 6 p.m.
- Kingsland School Board, Elementary Conference Room, 6 p.m.
- Preston City Council, City Hall, 6 p.m.
- Spring Grove School Board, Media Center, 7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, July 19

- Houston County Commissioners, Work Group, Courthouse Board Room, 9:30 a.m.
- Mabel-Canton School Board, Media Center, 6 p.m.
- Spring Grove City Council, Spring Grove Communications Building, 6 p.m.
- LeRoy-Ostrander School Board, Board Room, 6:30 p.m.
- Grand Meadow School Board, Choir Room, 7 p.m.
- Rushford Village City Council, Village Hall, 7 p.m.

Thursday, July 21

- Fillmore County Planning & Zoning Commission, Courthouse, 7 p.m.

Monday, July 25

- Caledonia City Council, City Hall, 6 p.m.
- Rushford City Council, City Hall, 6:30 p.m.
- Chatfield City Council, City Hall, 7 p.m.

**Schedule subject to change.*

Editorial Cartoon

