

New Shoes or a Haircut

93RD CHANCELLOR HON. A. MICHAEL SNYDER (RET.)



Over the past few months, as we've stayed at home to be safe, working at home, reading and hearing about the world around us in utter chaos, we may have had a tendency to let ourselves go a bit. In our idle moments, as we've taken stock of our appearance, we might have asked ourselves, "What do I do to spruce myself up? What do I change first? Do I start at the top with a new haircut, or do I start at the bottom with some new shoes?"

These offhand idle-moment petty thoughts came to my mind this past week as I sit here writing this column, which you are seeing in July. On their own, these thoughts are barely worth writing, until I realized that they are questions that are relevant on a much larger scale. Restated in global terms, the questions really are: "How do we change where we are as a nation? What are our priorities as we move forward? How do we make us, as Americans, better?"

As we've moved through the pandemic and COVID-19, with ineffective and negative national leadership, we've also found ourselves in the middle of another pandemic: the pandemic of heightened racial tensions, violence, and death, all spurred on by the same negative national leadership.

When we want to look for guidance through these dual pandemics of disease and hatred, we find ourselves stymied at the paucity of wise counsel coming from many of our elected leaders. Scientific experts on the COVID-19 pandemic, who should be listened to with respect, are denigrated by a President who advocates the use of injections of Clorox, or the swallowing of medications that have been deemed dangerous by the organized scientific community. Mayors and governors who seek to calm and unite a citizenry rightfully inflamed by the murders of innocent civilians by police, whether active or former, are called weak by this same president, who advises that protesters should be "put down" as if they are rabid animals.

There should be no question that change in leadership at the national level is an imperative. There should be no question that we need leadership at all levels that is rational, thoughtful, calm, and informed. We cannot continue to exist as a nation—as a democracy—with leadership that bases its actions on insults, threats, innuendo, exaggerations, falsehoods, and Tweets. Change is clearly needed at the top of our government.

However, in order to accomplish change at the top, we must work to accomplish change from the bottom up. We must reexamine our own thoughts and actions. We must remember that a decent free society requires the cooperation and effort of all.

As lawyers, we are the foundation of any civilized society. We are relied upon to advocate for, to create, and to administer the structures of a decent society. We are, in fact, charged with being the agents of change. We can no longer allow ourselves

to think that the problems that are endemic to our society are the problems of others. We must take ownership of the need to lead, to call out bad conduct when we see it, and to advocate for good. A democracy is a fragile organism; it thrives when it is nurtured, but it withers when it is ignored.

Looking at ourselves in the mirror of the world, there is no question that we need a new haircut, but we also need new shoes to get us to the barber. It's up to each of us to act as the new shoes to get America a new haircut. ■

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