

Thanksgiving Day 2020

By Don Sutherland

Thanksgiving Day passed with myriad reasons for which one should be thankful: family, friends, and the people who make one's lives meaningful. One could also be thankful for a better future as the COVID-19 vaccines developed by Pfizer and Moderna proved highly effective in their final large-scale trials. Those vaccines will eventually turn the tide in the unrelenting pandemic that has now claimed more than 270,000 American lives, all in less than one year's time.

Politically, there is also much for which to be thankful. In coming decades, historians will write of how a defeated alternative reality Presidency met its demise at the hands of a historical electoral turnout. Historians will write of how a large section of one of the nation's two major political parties—one with a proud legacy that included the Presidencies of Abraham Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt, and Ronald Reagan—was so unable to understand or accept the defeat of Donald Trump that it descended into the deep darkness of conspiracy theories to avoid confronting the reality of what had happened.

At the same time, there will be tales of modern-day heroism. A Republican Governor and Secretary State in Georgia refused to succumb to pressure aimed at overturning the election outcome in their state. A Republican state canvasser in Michigan certified the results to preserve the integrity of the outcome in his state. A Democratic Secretary of State in Pennsylvania waged battle to ensure that her state's voters would not be disenfranchised. And at a time when Talk Radio propagandists hatched de facto coup plots to have Republican-led State Legislatures try to overturn the election outcomes in their states, the state and federal court system proved to be the glue that held the nation's more than two century experiment in republican government together. In those courtrooms, facts, evidence, and truth still mattered.

In the end, the system took blows, institutional safeguards were damaged, efforts to exploit political polarization deepened divisions, but the system did not collapse. Representative government in the United States survived its sternest test since the U.S. Civil War. That system has been the foundation on which the nation has made enormous progress in pursuit of a "more perfect Union." Now, the detour from that pursuit has run its course. The nation is poised to resume its historic quest in which more and more people are included in the fabric of all aspects of the national life. For that, one can also be thankful.