Opinion



A woman holds a sign during the launch of a 23-hour prayer vigil June 29 on Capitol Hill in Washington. (CNS/Jaclyn Lippelmann)



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Today, I just want to share a few random thoughts relative to my most recent blog on identifying the Democratic Party's agenda.

In some ways, the agenda of the Democratic Party is a difficult one to sell. At the same time, without denigrating the value of Republican Party principles, there are parts of its message that can be easier to convey. I'm not talking about mainstream Republican notions of smaller government or pro-growth tax policies. These are legitimate political positions whether one agrees with them or not. I'm referencing the campaign rhetoric of then-candidate Donald Trump and the policies his administration has pursued since the election.

I believe, and I think experience demonstrates, that all of us exemplify both good and bad tendencies. We do care about other people, even beyond our own families. When confronted with the plight of other people in need, we can be motivated to reach out to provide necessary assistance. Americans have always shown great resolve in a crisis to roll up their sleeves and work together to help in any way possible.

Yet, all of us have another side. I am reminded of the cowboy movies I used to watch as a kid. An innocent man would be arrested for murder and put in jail. Some individual would stir up the good citizens of the town and they would descend on the jail to tell the sheriff to release the prisoner so he could be hanged. Only when the sheriff threatens them and reminds them that everyone is entitled to a fair trial do they sheepishly return home.

Collective behavior or a mob mentality is a reality. We can all be susceptible to it. A skilled communicator like President Trump can be very persuasive. It is not that difficult, for example, to rile up a crowd of Boy Scouts and get them cheering for a

dubious political agenda.

It is not exactly a great feat to get thousands of 12-year-old boys booing former President Barack Obama or Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. Perhaps that is why so many parents protested the use of a Scout jamboree for a political rally.

The issue to my mind, is that it is relatively easy to get people to see the flaws in others and respond in a negative way. Rhetoric suggesting that other people are lazy or taking advantage of government generosity can be appealing. Finding someone other than ourselves to blame for whatever problems we may see is tempting.

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On the other hand, demonstrating that we actually benefit when we help others is a more difficult concept. Explaining why immigrants contribute to the well-being of our country, and ourselves, is a bit more complicated. It may also be easier to say that I'm young and don't need health care, than it would be to say that I will need health care someday, and the health care system will work for everybody only when everybody contributes.

Someone who is willing to demagogue controversial issues can be difficult to refute.

Moreover, many have observed that there is an increase in hate groups since the election. Violence against immigrants, Muslim Americans, and others has increased. Groups that denigrate those they see as different and thus "not real Americans," feel they now have the White House on their side.

My concern is that the Trump effect has not just impacted those who already participate in or are sympathetic to such groups. I believe the Trump effect has affected the rest of us as well. The civil behavior we have been used to when interacting with each other is deteriorating. Good people now seem empowered to express some inner biases that they have been reluctant to voice in the past. As a country, we are moving backwards on issues of race, immigration and compassion for one another.

We all know that the level of civility and reasoned political debate has eroded. Every hateful tweet emanating from this White House reinforces a new way to be

president, and the need to find a new way to exist in a democracy. Will we even be able to retain our democracy?

As we draw closer to our next national election, we would do well to contemplate what it will look like and what will be the result. Will we again be subjected to fake news, demagoguery, over-the-top negative ads, etc.? How will we respond to such an election? Will we be only too willing to succumb to the negative rhetoric and believe the worst about each other?

Hopefully we will remember that we are all in this together. None of us are perfect, but most of us are trying to advance an agenda that will make life better for ordinary Americans. If we can latch on to such a belief, we just might be able to come out of the 2018 election pointed towards solid legislative goals that can make things better for all of us, and not just for a privileged few.