Opinion
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A rainbow is seen over the North Lawn of the White House in Washington, D.C., May 11. (Official White House Photo/Katie Ricks)



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I am writing this letter with three caveats attached — something I have used very little over the years.

But this is a different kind of moment for America. This brings with it a moment when Americans cope with an entirely new idea of what it means to be alive in a climate that feels more like we are swaying in the wind rather than planted on rock.

And yet, it is this kind of moment that patriots handle best.

Real patriots always know what they are seeing. Then they determine what has to be done to deal with it. They think deeply and consider the best ways to handle this thing, not the best way to get out of it. They face what they're looking at and if the situation is a serious one, they stand up to it with all their hearts. Whatever the danger.

Why take those risks? Because to ignore what must be done may well be exactly what endangers the very life we love. And what's more, as part of the country we've built and the people who have built it with us, we promised one another years ago that we would do together whatever it took to keep America at its best, our best, now.

We called the promise "the National Anthem" and we raised our voices in national unity event after event for years, whenever we needed it most.

Well, this is one of those times. This is the moment, it seems, when we need to recall what we are and what it will take to maintain it.

So this time, I'm writing to all of you with my heart in my hands.

No, I'm not concerned because we struggled in a debate. On that date, President Joe Biden was, apparently, simply too exhausted after weeks of tension and travel, both national and international, to bring his best self to last week's arm wrestling with Donald Trump.

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In the light of this year's coming election, then, it is not too serious to say that at this moment we are risking the loss of our democracy in the face of a dictator in waiting.

It is no small challenge.

But there are three caveats from our past that ring in our ears as we go, reminding us who we are this time again.

Caveat one is fatigue.

I'm not surprised that Biden is showing signs of unusual stress after his continuous travel on behalf of those undergoing struggles in both Ukraine and Europe as well as here.

To be part of the tensions involved in both those areas as well as in our own political demands in the midst of an election year requires even more care than usual.

No, not for a minute do I find that kind of sacrifice either unusual or unnecessary in so many situations. On the contrary.

In fact, part of Biden's strength resides in his continual care for others and his dedication to duty.

So I have also looked back on the elections of our own lifetime to see the kinds of care that have been needed by other presidents who found themselves in times that required of them so much, too often.

As Biden found himself bound to both local and foreign situations these last months, he was certainly not the first of our presidents who found themselves encumbered before the debate and even because of those debates.

Caveat two is danger.

President John F. Kennedy, a president too young to find himself surrounded by Russian rockets — and then worse! — found himself in a tangle that could have brought the first nuclear war down on our heads but didn't because he risked negotiating where no one else thought he should or could. But he did!

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Caveat three is age and endurance.

And, of course, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt who came down with polio at the age of 39 but directed the country through World War II from a wheelchair and died at the age of 63 — not older than most but younger than most — crippled and yet intent on his work for us.

And President Ronald Reagan who wasn't worried about South American immigrants but stopped the rise of communist government in Europe by rolling back anti-communist movements everywhere for eight years when he was president from 1981 to 1989.

Clearly, we are now facing new times and new demands again.

The concerns now are beyond party politics and legislative struggles in Congress, and are more centered on flags that are being turned upside down to signal our polarization.

From where I stand, only one thing is really clear, in fact. It's not about fatigue or danger or age and endurance. It's about doing what we each need to do to help one another profit the whole country, the whole globe.

We need patriots to make America American again.

Patriots who don't think, "America is a horrible place."

Patriots who respect the Constitution, especially those who have taken an oath to uphold it.

Patriots who want a democracy, not a kingdom.

Patriots who can sing best the National Anthem that goes on teaching us to preserve "the land of the free and the home of the brave," from those who here and now are attempting to destroy it.

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