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Electile dysfunction?

It's amazing how much a column can change overnight, and on the occasions I give myself enough of a head start to be able to revisit a column after a night's sleep, I continually find there is a great deal more or less in a column than I initially thought.

Anyway, if the phrase is something I picked up watching part of a television show, such as Colbert's "The Word," then I apologize and hereby publicly chastise myself. No matter whether I came up with it myself without subconscious plagiarism, I hope you laughed when you read it.

Either way, it's dysfunction, without regard to my originality. In fact, it's hard not to feel discouraged by politics as usual.

It seems every single ad that we've seen has literally accused that candidate's opponent of being a criminal. At the very least, everyone running for election was accused of being immoral, corrupt, motivated solely by greed and power, and generally worthless. Accordingly, we wind up with candidates from all parties who are elected only after being torn limb from limb by accusations that would make most felons blush. We must ensure this does not migrate into judicial campaigns, before we find that even the judges we elect will have been so besmirched and sullied their swearing-in ceremonies will become a source of embarrassment rather than pride, as they should be.

I realize this is not a new trend. A retired Supreme Court judge once called me years ago and told me about a painting he hung on the wall of his chambers. He said that when people felt really discouraged during the Watergate Era, he used to point at the painting and explain our country had been through a lot before, and that we would get through that downturn as well.

The painting depicted an old Midwest election. It was obvious the people depicted heading toward the polls were being given drinks — "guidance" — and plain old-fashioned currency. The judge told me he used to look at the painting and think about how difficult it must have been for our country to get out of such a slump. When Watergate hit, he was confident that by looking at that picture he could gather up enough confidence in our collective future to weather the storm, and encourage others to do the same. I was honored when he later showed up at our firm, and presented me with the painting as a gift. Even though he no

longer was on the bench, he refused to let me pay for it, and we proudly display it in our waiting room.

This year, it's difficult to believe we can have confidence in anyone who winds up winning. Virtually every single candidate has been dissected, misquoted, then singularly blamed as though he or she is solely responsible for everything wrong in our lives or our society. The cumulative effect may be subtle, and continually building within our subconscious, but I cannot believe it will have anything other than a horribly negative and residual impact on all of us.

There have been several instances in our history when I felt so discouraged, when all hope seemed to be gone, and a bleak future seemed certain.

Beneath it all, however, I try remember that our country functions with one pivotal pendulum that always seems to ebb and flow. Each time our country ventures too far out on the political precipice, something corrects it. I try not to forget that most people I've known in public office are far better than the pictures painted of them during the election cycles. I try to think of the individuals, instead of a blurry mass of corruption, all melded together by the quest of their opposition candidates' election-time advertising fervor.

As I write this, the election is at hand, but as you read this, the results already have been handed to us all. It's obviously going to be a messy outcome, and I can't help but worry about the fact that it appears most decision-making will be made by that segment of our population that is so uninspired or disgusted they nonetheless will fail to vote, regardless of the reason.

Maybe we should take some solace from baseball. The Giants just won the World Series — go figure! Half the teams that have ever played in the series lost. Nonetheless, they persevere until the next season.

Maybe during this election half of our country can win. We will persevere until the next one.

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