

Our history shows us that our usually slow-moving republic can periodically make leaps of progress that immeasurably better the lives of our citizens. If this happened too often, it could be destabilizing. But over time, we find needs that have not been met or require governmental planning. These leaps began almost immediately after becoming a nation.

President Jefferson promoted an infrastructure program that built the Erie Canal system along the rivers of New York that made possible water transportation of goods that opened up the then west, Ohio.

President Lincoln began the building of the transcontinental railroads, that opened this country from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

President Theodore Roosevelt launched the National Parks system that protected our best treasures from despoiling by industrial development. This was our first environmental law.

President Franklin Delano Roosevelt initiated numerous programs that saved this country from political disaster during the great Depression, addressing and rescuing crumbling infrastructure, funds to save artists, libraries, schools, banks, and the building that came with them.

President Eisenhower quietly built the interstate highway system, theoretically for national security, but actually creating a rapid road system never before addressed on a national level.

There are things that cannot be accomplished for the benefit of all citizens, but are addressed piecemeal by the individual states. Over time, this leaves a very uneven development of institutions with some states flourishing and others mired in the static past. Such differences affect our political systems too, as we can see today. We see it most in the growing divide between rural and urban America.

The large cities are doing best with optimum benefits for business, education, and health. The rural areas are suffering deterioration, loss of population, and bad health consequences. Such disparities are made worse by the political arrangements of our democracy: gerrymandering voting districts, a senate with two members from each state (disregarding population size), giving undue power to individuals from very small states being able to halt majority mandates.

President Biden was elected in the midst of problems that could have destroyed our system of rule of law, with a defeated president refusing to accept defeat, fomenting a campaign to undo the election and create a dictatorship. The attempted coup failed, but the elected president saw that this was the time for major changes that could bridge the gulf between the haves and have nots.

He pushed through a rescue bill that pumped money into all sectors laid low by a devastating pandemic. This provided temporary relief. But now, he has supported a once in several generations program of addressing a number of essential issues: crumbling physical infrastructure (bridges, transit, ports, water systems) which has just passed with the help of some Republicans.

More difficult is the social infrastructure program that addresses childcare, working women, upgrading education for the new jobs, environmental protections, innovation, medical care for everyone, voting rights with national uniformity, and probably most difficult of all: restoration of all guardrail institutions that protect us from those with dictatorial aspirations. We are once more looking at ethics.

Why this current leap of progress is needed is that the revolution in technology rushed in with consequences that left many with no protections at all. This tech revolution has also laid waste to the former communications systems shared by all: daily newspapers, only a few TV channels with programs watched by most of us, and a common system of elementary through high school education.

President Lincoln said it well when he said a nation half slave and half free cannot stand. The supporters of the slave half tried to withdraw from the union and waged war, which they lost. Now the danger comes from those following facts (truth) and those believing conspiracies (alternate facts). The economic and social chasms must be addressed if we are to have one nation, under law, with justice for all, not two

fighting camps.

President Biden believes that this emergency gives us a reason for finally creating a more just, more equal society: jobs, health, environment and common values. The Build Better Act appears to be the road to such a rescue.

687 words

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