**America on Fire**

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Make no mistake: America is on fire, literally and figuratively. Forest fires rage on the West coast some uncontrollably. Temperatures soar above 100 degrees F and not only here. And perhaps most dangerously, America’s political temperature has reached the boiling point.

For the first time since polls began, never have the former and current president and Congress all been viewed more negatively. 75 to 85 per cent of Americans believe the US is on the wrong track. Current polls show an unhealthy cynicism of Americans towards the government and members of the other party. The number advocating a forceful overthrow of government is waxing.

Will this fire burn itself out? Or will it gain strength and spread? Certainly, this heat wave will abate yet return at some point meaning that the nation will have to learn to live with well above normal temperatures for the long term. But the political fires are far from being contained, let alone extinguished.

What can be done? There is only one answer and only the president can provide that. Despite the harsh bipartisan criticisms of Joe Biden, the US has only one president at a time. And it is only the president who can and must exercise leadership and competence to cool down the nation’s overheated political temperature once his Covid passes.

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The president must take three actions. First, the president must summon the leaders of Congress-the Speaker and heads of both parties of both Houses-to Camp David or some other sequestered location. Then he must keep them there until an agreement can be reached on critical issues, particularly this one: repairing the hostile and hateful attitudes that persist on Capitol Hill between the parties or face guaranteeing a permanently crippled and failing government.

The only way this truce can be imposed is for these leaders to restrain the extreme wings of each party. That may seem absurd. But if the influence of Donald Trump and the extreme progressive views on the other side cannot be moderated, the political temperature could explode. While another civil war with armies fighting on both sides will not break out, the Constitution could be broken and good governance is never restored in our lifetime. In stark terms, any objective observer would agree that the nation is in political extremis.

Second, the president must regularly meet with members of both parties in Congress to determine common ground in order to pass vital legislation that can address the crises confronting the nation. The president must be emphatic in impressing on members the dangerous condition of the nation’s health and the responsibility of elected leaders to deal with it. This will require skill, patience and compromise on all sides. And given the highly toxic and deadly political atmosphere in America, this could make Sisyphean Labor look easy.

Third, this truce and rapprochement must be extended to the public discourse. To start, the government on both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue must show one example of competence. With the January 6th Hearings providing irrefutable evidence of presidential dereliction of duty in not halting the riots regardless if criminal charges are brought or not and the November elections exacerbating the political divides and national polarization, this may be mission impossible.

In normal times, these recommendations for action might best be deferred until after the January 6th hearings and November elections conclude. However, the nation does not have the luxury of waiting that long. Should Trump be indicted, the political temperature will explode to nuclear proportions. In the past, the nation survived a civil war and a presidential resignation over the crime of covering up the Watergate break-in. It is not clear that history will repeat itself.

Muddling through has been one salvation. However, with the many crises plaguing the nation, muddling through is a weak reed for hope. After losing the Battle of Saratoga in 1778 when many Englishman believed “we are ruined,” the famous Scots economist Adam Smith counselled: “There is a lot of ruin in a nation.”

But is there? Has the United States reached a point where accommodating or absorbing more ruin is no longer possible? America is on fire. Despite the threat of climate change that could not have been made more vivid than last week, the US has no plan to confront it. And many Americans deny climate change exists as they do over who won the last election. Meanwhile, as the political crisis grows larger only the president can confront it. But, will he? And, can he?

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