



WE THE PEOPLE

BY DAVID ADLER, *The Alturas Institute*

American Character and a Resurgent Congress Can Restore a Constitutional Presidency

At year's end, we lament the decline of constitutionalism—respect for and adherence to the separation of powers, checks and balances, the Bill of Rights and the rule of law. But in America, hope springs eternal. We are an optimistic nation. Stirred by leaders' eloquent appeals to hope, and historic reminders that we have overcome great challenges—Civil War, Great Depression, grave threats, foreign and domestic—our citizenry has pressed on, rowing longer, running faster and working harder, time and again, refusing to lie down and accept defeat. Such is the American character.

So it is with a grand experiment, and America is an experiment. We take pride in our nation, extol the virtues and values expressed in the Declaration of Independence, which charts the American Creed. We teach it and preach it, even when we don't achieve it. As readers know, when Americans are knocked to the canvass, we don't stay down; we rise and resume fighting for our causes. Since Lexington and Concord and Selma, Americans have fought for liberty and constitutional government, justice and legal protections, representation and remedies.

As participants in a historical experiment—a government of, by and for the people, as Abraham Lincoln described it—citizens understand that defense of democracy requires hard work and vigilance. James Madison, in Federalist 51, emphasized the fact that governmental accountability requires a “principal reliance” on the people, who have a high duty to scrutinize governmental actions, policies and programs, and to demand of those holding office fulfillment of their constitutional responsibilities and progress toward the expectations of the people.

Many across our country have justly expressed deep concerns about governmental institutions—the current indifference, for example, of the president and Congress to constitutional principles. Thoughtful readers have asked about the ways and means necessary to restore a constitutional presidency, which has been a central concern of this column. We may add to this project, as readers have suggested, the responsibility of Congress in accounting for the rise of an imperial presidency, and to ask how the “first branch of government,” as Madison explained it, can contribute to the rehabilitation of the executive. These insightful questions and sug-

gestions reflect among the citizenry an intense and admirable interest in self-government, indeed, the experiment launched by our founders, 250 years ago.

It may be that the hope of restoring a constitutional presidency hinges on a genuine resurgence of congressional power, which requires recovery from its own lethargy, passivity and impotence, and a renewal of its institutional integrity and pride. What cannot be ignored, of course, is that the rise of presidential government has been aided by congressional retreat. There would be no imperial presidency were it not for an indifferent Congress, unwilling to assert its powers and defend its turf. What is sorely missing in America is a Congress that takes the Constitution seriously.

Who will sound the trumpet call for a revival of the spirit, fortitude and integrity of congressional bodies that have sought to check executive power, as seen in the assertiveness of the Senate Select Committee that investigated the Watergate scandal, or the Church Committee that endeavored to curb the abuses of the CIA? Is it reasonable to believe that Congress will recover its institutional honor and prevent the further deterioration of the American Republic? As a body, and across the years Congress, whether in the hands of Republicans or Democrats, has been gripped by both partisanship and a lack of institutional dignity. If, at this juncture, when executive power has reached a historic peak, America hopes to witness a legislative reassertion of its lawmaking, foreign affairs, appropriations and oversight powers, in a manner befitting its central role in our constitutional system, for the purpose of renewing a moribund doctrine of checks and balances, then Congress simply must regain its institutional character and curb its partisan loyalties to the occupant in the White House.

This congressional reversal will require leadership, certainly, and quite possibly the leadership that arises from an aroused citizenry triggered by a renewed appreciation for the virtues and values of constitutionalism. In a republic, as Madison told us, there is no substitute for a vigilant citizenry. Let this be our first, and lasting, New Year's Resolution for 2026.

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BACK IN THE DAY

Underwood

COMPILED BY SHELLY WALLACE

from the Files of the Central McLean News Journal

20 years ago, Jan. 2006

To begin the New Year, the McLean County Commission made appointments to various county boards for 2006 at the Tuesday morning meeting. In the first item of business, however, Commissioner Ron Krebsbach was named chairperson for 2006, replacing current Chairperson Commissioner Julie Hudson Schenfisch, with Commissioner Steve Lee named vice president.

The following people expressed interest in being re-appointed to their current county positions: Ben Gehring as coroner, Ron Wagner as highway superintendent, Mary Ann Anderson as clerk of court, Todd Schreiner as E-911 coordinator, Lauren Hunze as tax administrator and land use administrator.

McLean County Land Use Administrator and Tax Administrator Lauren Hunze presented a diagram provided by Al Carvell of the Painted Woods Development, which will be located around the Painted Woods Golf Course.

The announcement in mid-2005 that an ethanol plant would be built near Great River Energy's Coal Creek Station is not only good news for Washburn and Underwood, it is also good news for McLean County. Concrete is being poured for the \$85 million Blue Flint Ethanol Plant that is expected to produce 65 million gallons of ethanol annually, starting in 2007.

The meat of the basketball season begins in earnest today with the start of the annual McLean County Boys Basketball Tournament.

30 years ago, Jan. 1996

The Underwood Comets rocked and shocked the Washburn Cardinals and everyone else keeping tabs on the McLean County Invitational Tournament when the eighth seeded Comets bumped off the top seeded Cardinals Monday night by a score of 61-59. Underwood was paced by senior guard Krist Kjelstrup's 16 points.

The windows at Harold's TV and Appliance aren't radiating light very often; the door is not open on a regular basis; Harold Lutz is basically letting the inventory dwindle. The business is available for sale. “There is enough business here for someone to make a living if they want to work,” said Lutz. The business has been in Underwood since 1953.

The entrepreneur group at the Underwood School is alive and growing. Nearly the whole group, 52 strong, visited Marketplace '96 in Bismarck Thursday. The next project in line for the group is the Young Entrepreneur Fair sponsored by the McLean County Jobs Development Commission in Underwood in March.

40 years ago, Jan. 1986

Jay Snyder was presented with an award for outstanding sales, customer

service and promotion of sunflowers by the Sokota Seed Company.

Residents in Coleharbor were without water for about 12 hours as workers attempted to locate and eliminate a blockage in the city sewer system. Water was turned off about midnight to prevent further flow of water into the pipes which were backing up into area homes.

The McLean County Park Board proposed spending its money this year on maintaining boat ramps and possibly developing a recreational park on Lake Sakakawea near Coleharbor. The recreational site near Coleharbor would bring in traffic off of Highway 83, board member John Seeger said. Development of the Coleharbor site was mentioned as a major state centennial project for McLean County.

School started for 32 kindergarten students and their teacher, Mrs. Gloria Porterfield.

McLean County Treasurer Rodney Slagg announced his retirement, effective May 1, at the Jan. 7 meeting of the county commission. Slagg has been with the office 25 years, 14 as deputy and 11 as treasurer.

55 years ago, Jan. 1971

The Underwood Fire Department's new ambulance had its initial run when Fire Chief Fred Eman picked up a resident of the home at an area hospital. To date, the ambulance fund has grown to \$2,520 and contributions are still needed.

The science room of UHS now houses a small nine-inch, beady eyed monster. The new addition is a baby alligator. He is kept in a glass case in which two light bulbs are kept burning for warmth. His lone companion is a small common North Dakota frog.

The board of directors of Prairieview Nursing Home Auxiliary elected officers for the coming year. Mrs. Rayland Landenberger was named president; Mrs. Lloyd Schafer, vice president; Mrs. Wallace Sandberg, secretary; and Mrs. Parnell Johnson, treasurer.

About 175 friends, neighbors and relatives called at the Hwy. 83 Cafeteria in Coleharbor Sunday to honor Mr. and Mrs. Buel Barnes for their 25th wedding anniversary. Mr. and Mrs. Barnes are long-time residents of Coleharbor and operators of the Hi-Way Cafeteria, which is in its 25th year of operation.

65 years ago, Jan. 1961

The ladies of St. Ann's Altar Society of St. Bonaventure Catholic Church are sponsoring an old-fashioned card party at the Underwood City Hall. Card playing will be followed by lunch and dancing, with music furnished by Billy Minter's orchestra. Admission is only 50 cents.

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3 p.m. Monday – classifieds
10 a.m. Tuesday – advertisements, public notices, news and area announcements