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Weekly Thoughts on Music, Nature, and Politics, from the Catskill Mountains

America Derailed

By guest writer Herb Rubenstein

Warren Buffet during his lifetime saw real per capita Gross Domestic Product (adjusted for inflation) grow six fold, and he may well see it grow to seven fold if he lives another decade. Today, our economy looks great – low unemployment, low inflation, great consumer confidence, a stock market at near record levels, corporate profits high and growing, and many other factors suggest we are doing great as a country economically.

However, as we learned in 1929, in 1968, in 2001, in 2008, and will learn again soon, our economic success is a function of smoothly working, successful governments at the federal, state and local levels. In 2001 we were attacked on 9/11. In 1929, our economy derailed as there was an “asset bubble” that took root in 1920 and for the next nine years the stock market rose 20% a year on average. demand for good and services.

Companies began to over produce and then demand fell. Large inventories, once highly valued, not only became worthless, their value turned negative due to the costs of storage, sales, and management.

In 1968, we had both a losing and costly war in Viet Nam and a war in the streets of America as the struggle for civil rights took the life of Martin Luther King and our cities burned. From 1968 to 1971, the stock market dropped 36%, unemployment rose from 3.7% to 5.1%, GDP only grew 1.1% over the entire three year period, inflation was starting to rear its ugly head, and we were starting on a path to Watergate.

In 2000 we had another bubble, the information technology bubble, and in 2008, the market again collapsed and only large, but not large enough, government intervention in taking over companies, putting huge amounts of cash into companies, and changing the entire way we regulated the economy, was there any hope of economic growth. We did have continuous, steady economic growth from 2009 to today, but many have been left out of this growth.

Today, we are besieged by four huge forces all working against the United States: 1) Continued wars with their high human and economic price tags with no end in sight or victory possible; 2) An opioid and drug crises taking the lives and happiness from millions of Americans and their families; 3) Social wars between white supremacists, abortion foes, gun lobby supporters, anti-immigrant, who have significant support from those in government and the civil rights supporting Americans who support equal rights for all races, ethnicities, sexual orientations, support a woman's right to chose to end a pregnancy, common sense gun reform, and manageable, pro-immigrant policies. Each one of these three sets of social forces are tearing our country apart, or as I prefer to say, "derailing America."

America was built on the "rails" that opened up territory, gave large swaths of land to people for care and management, opened up our energy sector and our commercial sector, and created a nation from sea to shining sea. The three social forces above, alone, are not enough to "derail" America. Rails are dug in well. They support tons and tons of locomotives. They know where they are headed, and planned very carefully. They enable

and empower people and once laid and once used, they stand the test of time, with proper maintenance.

So, how and why is America becoming derailed now. The coming governmental crisis with the Trump Administration, with corruption in the State of New York, the militarization of our Immigration and Customs Enforcement agencies, the withdrawal of governments from reasonable environmental, financial, and economic regulations, the cutting off of tax monies to all branches of government, the failure of our schools, and the inability of our governments to even pass budgets are all leading to what we in the US say about other countries – a failed state. Louisiana is a failed state. Its schools are a disaster, its poverty and environmental degradation are devastating, Oklahoma is now the earthquake capital of the world due to lack of oil and gas regulation. The US federal government is at war with California. Russia may well have determined who was elected President, and this President and his party are fighting the courageous Americans seeking to learn the truth about this Russia meddling and the President's relationship with our most serious foreign enemy.

It is one thing to be an “empire in decline” as we are compared to the coming ascendancy of China or India. Those societies have their faults as well and their faults will keep them from growing economically or being great places to live socially for decades to come. However, it is the US that is going backwards the fastest. Yes, our economic statistics do not show it yet, but trains take some time to slow down after they start sliding off the rails.

America derailed will be the banner of the 2020 – 2040 period, unless we do something about it collectively now. Recently, I heard that “If America is to solve its problems, Americans must stop attacking each other and start working together to solve our problems.” Unfortunately, in 2016 we elected “an attack dog” and he is feeding his fellow “attack dogs” with cabinet posts, tax cuts, judicial nominations, propaganda, lies, and distortions of the truth greater than even George Orwell predicted. Further, our government has turned on our own people in favor of Russia and other countries who can help make our wealthiest citizens even wealthier.

Start working together? This would be like a doctor who says we need to start working with our cancerous tumors.

No, doctors kill cancerous tumors. For Americans who believe in democracy, civil rights, and our constitution, we need to vote the cancerous ones out of office first, and then start working with the people who we get elected to bring our nation back to its roots, its promise, its potential. Resistance to the attack dogs is useful, but defeating attack dogs takes more than resistance. It takes a well planned, vigorous counter attack. The drivers of many lever of government are driving the trains of our government in a direction our tracks for our governments were never designed to go. When the drivers try to drive fast, in a direction where the tracks laid long ago are not headed, trains get derailed.

Today, we have a call for action. Stop the drivers trying to drive our train, America, in the wrong direction. Get on the train. Get out of your seat in the train. Vote, help investigate, argue for justice, make noise in the streets and to your elected and appointed representatives, and when you get a chance to pull the voting lever (like pulling the STOP lever on the train), not only pull the lever, but take 100 people to the polls to give them a new chance to pull that voting lever.

America became great because people did rise up and fight for what is right. We will not be silenced by non-disclosure agreements. We will not be bound by arbitration clauses signed under coercion and designed from us going to the courts to achieve justice.

Warren Buffet believes the best is yet to come for America. Let us make him right through our actions. Only action and winning elections will stop the train we call “America” from continuing to go in the wrong direction. Trump and his attack dogs want us to enter into a “post – ethics” era. We need to bring ethics and integrity back to America, because it is ethics that is the solid ground upon which our economic and social rails were built and kept getting stronger.

If we fail to bring back ethics and integrity in government, if we fail to stop the attack dogs in government from attacking our own citizens, then we not only become derailed, we will cease being America. We don't call individual cars of a train that fell off the rails and crashed into a deep gorge, a train. We call it a train wreck.

Herb Rubenstein 3/25/2018

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