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My View: In Arizona, let's make a public commitment to democracy



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It's been said many times by both of us that the foundations of our democracy are in peril: as a result, Arizona's society and economy have arrived at a precipice.

Elections used to be sacrosanct, with both Republicans and Democrats respecting the results of political contests because of a mutually held belief in the integrity of the system. Or, at minimum, an unspoken rule (and perhaps mutual recognition) existed that supporting our democratic institutions meant national stability. It meant that where other countries struggle to transfer power, America's commitment to a peaceful and stable transfer would consistently result in a stronger, better nation. As the last eight years have shown us, that stability is fragile.

The recognition of that fragility has, until recently, been consistently recognized by members of both major parties. It's why former President Ronald Reagan's words while signing the Voting Rights Act in 1981 still resonate so profoundly today: "Voting is the most sacred right...We cannot allow any American's vote to be denied, diluted, or defiled." Now more than ever, it is crucial that we come together, transcending party lines, to reassert our dedication to the principles that define us as a nation and have given us such a competitive advantage for so long: fairness, transparency, and respect for the rule of law.

That's why we're writing these words with a reminder of what's possible and a request for the future.

Our story of working together, despite our differences, is a story of how we are stronger together and that it is possible to set aside our differences in the name of free and fair elections. Despite being members of competing political parties, we worked together to administer Maricopa County's elections in 2018 and 2020. Instead of engaging in the usual hostility and animosity, we chose a different path.

Setting aside our political differences, we forged an unexpected bond grounded in our shared dedication to serving the people of Maricopa County - and in the process have become close friends and colleagues. We don't agree on every issue, but there is no doubt in either of our minds that American democracy is paramount and that it must be defended.

Now, in our respective roles of Arizona Secretary of State and Maricopa County Supervisor, we regularly collaborate on initiatives to enhance the electoral process to ensure that every vote counts.

Political stability is good for Arizona's economy

This stability is not only good for our democracy, but it is beneficial to Arizona's economy. The cooperation of elected officials and the business community is critical to ensuring ongoing growth and prosperity for all Arizonans. If our state is plunged into

chaos every few years simply because an election is held, that makes us less attractive to investors, innovators, and new talent – including students looking to go to school here and job-seekers looking for a new state to call home. That is why we hope that our friendship serves as a powerful reminder that, above all else, we are Americans, and our common values and aspirations transcend partisan divisions. Even in times of disagreement, civility, and cooperation are viable options that are good for society and good for the economy.

So, our ask to all candidates running for office is simple: can you commit publicly to respect the outcome of your election regardless of whether you win or lose?

As Former President Barack Obama emphasized in his farewell address in January 2017, "Our democracy is threatened whenever we take it for granted. All of us, regardless of party, should be throwing ourselves into the task of rebuilding our democratic institutions. It falls to each of us to be those anxious, jealous guardians of our democracy."

We know, beyond a doubt, that our elections are fair, accurate, and trustworthy. Let's seize this opportunity to put these challenging times behind us and refocus on the work we all should be doing as elected leaders, and make a positive difference in people's lives.

Adrian Fontes is Arizona's Secretary of State; Bill Gates is Maricopa County Supervisor.



Adrian Fontes, Arizona Secretary of State

ARIZONA SECRETARY OF STATE



Image: Maricopa County

Bill Gates, Maricopa County Supervisor

MARICOPA COUNTY
