CAMBRIDGE MATTERS - 2021-01

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Dear Readers:

These past two days have been filled with many experiences, thoughts, and emotions. At noon on Wednesday at the courthouse here in Cambridge, our new City Council began their four-year terms. For me and, I think, for those who were there, they and our new Mayor made us proud by what they each said in different ways after they took their oaths of office. Each talked about the need for us as a community to come together to address the challenges that we have, many of which have never been addressed or have only been partially addressed.

Most of our new leadership participated in contested elections, several of which were extremely close. They worked hard for the votes they received, as did their opponents. Three had runoffs in December two of which were decided by just a few votes. Jameson Harrington experienced a two-vote win to make it to the final vote and then won his position by six votes. Yet despite close votes, the results were accepted by the candidates and the community.

In 2020, the citizens of Cambridge came out to vote by mail and in person in numbers that had not been seen in years, if ever. That was the first step in making the change that needs to happen here. On Wednesday, we had a smooth and peaceful transition of city leadership that should be the envy of any community. It was also a generational change with the youngest elected leader being 29 and the oldest 49.

While our new leaders bring to us energy, excitement, and hope for the future of Cambridge, as they all said in their speeches, they cannot do it alone. The community must join with them to make the difference that can come and has been expected for so long.

What happened Wednesday in our Nation’s Capital is the result of actions and inactions the last four years by our national leadership, executive and legislative, that will change our country forever. I can only hope that it will be in positive ways. The mob violence, deaths, and injuries that took place are terrible. Hopefully, however, this experience will be the wake-up call that we need to understand behavior that some have ignored or accepted for too many years.

What happened at the U.S. Capitol were crimes against all of us. They are also sad, angering, upsetting, and frustrating. What I also think this experience tells us is that our country needs to listen to the voices from communities like Cambridge and its new leaders and local and state leaders across this country. While we do not have to agree on everything, both sides need to respect and listen to one another.

It will certainly take months if not years to find and prosecute all of those people who trespassed, defaced, and ransacked the Capitol Building. That work is already under way, and some have already been charged. It will take investigators, commissions, and trials to give us the details of what happened and why it happened just as was done after the September 11, 2001 attack on the United States. While I am sure that conclusions by the commissions will be made as well as recommendations, there will be too many people that will disregard them and believe that what we saw happen with our own eyes never happened or that what happened was somehow justified. It was not.

The third thing that occurred Wednesday that gives me hope is the voters’ decisions in Georgia to elect Rev. Warnock and Mr. Ossoff to the United States Senate. I do not know much about them or their opponents but did see one of the debates involving Rev. Warnock. My hope comes not so much from what they can or might do as Senators but rather from the fact that the Senate for at least two years will be shared equally by the Republicans and the Democrats.

By that sharing, those Senators in the middle will need to find common ground on issues that need to be decided and that all of us want decided. These past years of Republican leadership in the Senate and the refusal of the Majority Leader to bring legislation up for vote and possible resolution has made our legislative branch of government unworkable.

We saw it not only in legislation but in delays in appointments of executive branch senior staff that needed Senate approval, and refusals, in some cases, to appoint judges to the federal bench submitted by the President of the other party. While Senator McConnell had the legal right and power to do that with no objection by his party, it was not the right thing to do for our country. The people of Georgia have taken that power away from him and made the Republican Party the minority party in the Senate and Senator McConnell the Minority Leader.

As has been said since the founding of our country, we are a nation of laws and not of men/women. Those who disagreed with the national election outcome had every right to be heard in the courts of this country – state and federal. Since early November that was done, and virtually every court made decisions based on the law on jurisdictional issues and the law and the facts or lack of facts on other issues raised. Under our system, you go to court, as the President did many times, to have your grievances heard and decided. When he did, he lost almost every time; and when he went to the Supreme Court he lost consistently.

So, the days, weeks, months, and years to come require us to pay attention both here in Cambridge to help our local leaders with the challenges that they face in governing this small community and in our nation where the healing of much larger wounds needs to take place. Just as our new Mayor and Commissioners need help from the community to change and improve Cambridge, all of us also need to be a small part of what must be done for national change, if our democracy is to survive. It will not be easy. It may take the lifetime of many of us, but it must be done.

We all should be in dialogue with those who differ in their views. We should find places where we agree and work together to solve the problems that face us so that by working together we can begin to trust one another again.

Thanks for reading.

Steve