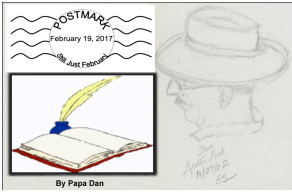


## Falling Down

By Dan Sapone



**Let's take a look at an old joke,  
an old, crude and insensitive little joke,  
and see if it applies to a current feature  
of our American Democracy.**

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### An Announcement

The scene is a large office building — the headquarters of a large national corporation. We see one, wide, uninterrupted floor of this office building containing several dozen cubicles and desks where people are working at their jobs. A voice comes over a loudspeaker and fills the room:

**“Ladies and gentlemen, may I have your attention please? It has come to the attention of management that some employees who are dying on the job are failing to fall down. As a result, given the nature of our workforce, it has become difficult for management to distinguish between employees who have died and those who are still working. Therefore, beginning immediately, employees who die on the job are instructed to fall down. This action will contribute significantly to our ability to assess our productivity and make necessary management decisions. Thank you. That is all.”**

### Applying the “Joke”

So, what does this rude and insensitive little story, have to do with the state of our American Democracy?

Since the early history of our “great American experiment in democracy,” the United States of America has organized itself into political parties. The Founders did not intend it to be so — parties are not mentioned in Hamilton’s “Federalist Papers” nor in the Constitution — but it happened anyway. They haven’t always been the same parties — some parties have come and gone as they became irrelevant (remember the Whigs and the Tories?); some have changed their names (recall the “Federalists” and the “Democratic Republicans?”); and throughout our history some citizens have declared themselves to be independent of those parties. But over my lifetime, American politics and government have been structured predominately by two competing political parties that have populated most of the positions of power and influence in our national decision-making. One is called The Democratic Party and the other is called The Republican Party. Both parties have long stood for a common set of values, broadly recognizable as American values, as initiated by the Founders, values that have kept the nation together over the past century or so since the Civil War. In that respect, the two parties have a lot of historic similarities. The differences between those parties have largely centered on the policies and strategies they have preferred in pursuit of those values. Most often, national decisions have been made with more-or-less respectful debate, persuasion based on regional interests, compromise (only possible because of the common values I mentioned), and voting.

**Today in America, however, the party that calls itself The Republican Party has died. It has died, but it has failed to fall down. As a result, there are still large numbers of citizens who believe that The Republican Party still exists. But it does not. It has died.**

Growing up, I accepted my father's assertion that "We are Roosevelt/Kennedy Democrats"—and I still do. However, well into my thirties, he and I knew and respected a number of Republicans. For them, if they are still alive and remember, their party has died. There was no funeral and some Americans mistakenly believe that it still lives.

OK so that is a dramatic assertion, which some may not accept. I understand that. So, how do we test that assertion? How does a person notice that The Republican Party has died? All my life, certainly since I was in high school, the Republican Party has stood for at least these 7 consistent values:

1. preserving American institutions,
2. supporting fiscal conservatism, defined as a federal budget balanced between income and expenditures (i.e., opposition to "deficit spending"),
3. supporting small business (evident in consistent support for local Chambers of Commerce),
4. maintaining strong international alliances in support of global economic strength and American foreign policy objectives like reciprocal trade and fierce opposition to foreign dictators (especially those in Communist Countries) all in support of international peace and stability,
5. basing policy decisions on science and academic excellence by supporting and consulting experts,
6. supporting reliable safety-net programs to ensure a minimum, decent standard of living for Americans,
7. actively promoting the value of common sense.

Those have been the fundamental values of the Republican Party since I was in high school, as confirmed repeatedly by spokespersons for that party. Those have long been called "Conservative" values. An observer will notice that those who claim to speak for the Republican Party today no longer stand for those values. Consider these observations on those topics — members of the Republican Party have advocated for the following things in very recent years:

1. They have worked very hard to diminish the effectiveness and credibility of long-standing government institutions such as the Justice Department and immigration authorities, criticized "so-called judges" of the federal courts who have ruled against Republican policy decisions, and depleted the ranks of long-standing institutions that have provided policy stability such as the State Department, Environmental Protection Agency, Postal Service, and Department of Energy.
2. They have proudly and repeatedly handed out large tax cuts for the wealthy blatantly causing budget deficits.
3. They have openly supported interests of the largest corporations, knowingly endangering the viability of small businesses, with tax policy and a willingness to renege on legitimate debts and agreements.
4. The current Republican Administration has repeatedly demonstrated deference and support for foreign dictators (e.g., Russia) who have shown a disregard for established national boundaries and attempted to undermine American elections. Republicans have resisted efforts

to defend against those threats, undermining investigations and weakening alliances the nation has relied on for decades.

5. They have rejected science, denying well-established scientific knowledge like the effects of our energy choices on destructive changes in the global climate — actually subsidizing corporate polluters! Under the current Republican administration, America is the only nation to withdraw from the Paris Global Climate Agreement!

6. They have slashed long-standing safety-net programs, cast dozens of votes attempting to take away health insurance from ordinary Americans, resisting and demeaning long-standing progress in the rights of women, and unravelling campaign finance regulations to give billionaires outsized influence over all government decision-making, while systemically attacking voting rights to make it harder for the young people, minorities, and the poor to vote.

7. They have thrown common sense to the winds by embracing wild conspiracy theories, like the health threat from windmills, widespread voter fraud, the fabrication of climate change by the Chinese, the credibility of certain birth certificates, (and more), despite public evidence to the contrary.

As former President Obama summarized in a speech in 2018, this Republican behavior is “not conservative. It sure isn't normal. It's radical. It's a vision that says the protection of ‘our’ power and those who support ‘our’ party is all that matters, even when it hurts the country. It's a vision that says the few who can afford a high-priced lobbyist and unlimited campaign contributions set the agenda. And over the past two years, this vision is now nearing its logical conclusion.”

The conservatism that guided the Republican Party of my youth is gone. Yes, the Republican Party has died. Believe it or not, the seeds of that death were planted during the first term of the Reagan administration (check out his huge budget deficits: \$195 billion in 1983, \$180 billion in 1984 – look it up). Reagan’s “Conservative” administration also undid restrictions on Saving and Loan institutions, leading directly to the S & L crisis and slashed federal mental health funding precipitating today’s homeless problem.

So, what has replaced this now-deceased political party? Those who currently call themselves Republicans have embraced the politics of “resentment, division, and paranoia” instead of what we used to understand to be “conservatism.” Fiscal conservatism, of course, has become an often-invoked myth. The values to be preserved are power and influence.

## **What To Do**

The dead-but-still-standing Republican Party, needs to be replaced by a large group of people who have a genuine interest in governing. I suppose, the problem could be described simply as a vocabulary issue. It seems that Republicans no longer understand the word “govern” to be a verb — that is, something that you DO. For some time, they have only recognized the word “government” — a noun that they utter bitterly as if it were a cuss word, pronounced either before or after spitting, as in “government regulation, ptieuuw!” They failed to learn (it was in the fifth grade), that the phrase “government regulation,” was one of the central purposes of government, as established by the Founders, to protect citizens against threats that they cannot fight individually. Over thousands of years, that phrase, “government regulation,” has been



the single dominant characteristic that has distinguished uncivilized disorderly collections of people from what historians and anthropologists call “civilization.” To answer the “what to do” question, there are three steps (there are always three):

**Step One:** the election of 2020 — A large Democratic Majority must be elected in both houses of Congress and in State Legislatures and City Councils across the country to replace the mythical and deceased, Republican Party of old. This must be accompanied by restoration of confidence in the integrity of elections — an effort to be pursued in parallel with Step One.

**Step Two:** A Democratic President must be elected in 2020 while simultaneously preserving and expanding the Democratic majority mentioned in **Step One**. Then, the challenge will still be immense. There will be a lot of damage to repair from years of cowardly fake conservatism (known as “Trumpism”) and the weak national response to Trumpism that made it possible.

**Step Three:** The utter completeness of the Republican defeat must be accompanied by a movement to re-establish traditional conservatism as the bedrock of a new party with a new name — how about “The Grand New Party.” That party needs to sit down across a table with Democrats and re-engage in the business of governing. They need to reassert a set of values that would be recognizably American and taught in public schools (well-funded public schools, by then) as principles we can all pursue together with our own regional flavors. Oh, by the way, elected representatives of the Democratic Party need to be rejuvenated (OK, replaced) with folks with a commitment to the future in addition to their commitment to the values of the past. If you want to read that to mean “replaced by younger folks,” go ahead.

**So, our question: Can all this be done in this generation?**

My answer: Nope. Clearly, my generation (the “Post-War Baby Boom”) has had its chance to make a difference and gets mixed reviews. We made some progress in the 1960s, but my generation also brought us all some pretty awful outcomes, in spite of a handful of promising leaders. So, my answer is No. Given who we are, collectively, and HOW we have been approaching this problem, it’s not going to happen. But I suppose we can start with Step One and Step Two today, so my grandchildren’s children can have a place to start.

**But Wait —**

We described a serious problem and proposed a challenging “What To DO” to solve it. BUT, in assessing whether we can accomplish that goal anytime soon, is it possible that we have left out the most important question:

**How?**

Maybe it will take a dramatic, but simple, answer. Can we supply the simple human ingredient that has been missing from our politics and governance? Maybe that answer can come from a song from the 1960s (OK, an approach my generation has offered many times). *Here it comes* – the climactic final song from an important musical from the late 1960s, which I had the privilege of seeing on the stage twice: “Jacques Brel Is Alive and Well and Living In Paris.” Translated from the French by Eric Blau and Mort Shuman, the lyrics (below), offer a solution. Sounds simple. Take a look at the lyrics and consider whether it is useful here in the 21st century. If we only ...

## If We Only Have Love

### Jacques Brel

If we only have love  
Then tomorrow will dawn  
And the days of our years  
Will rise on that morn.  
If we only have love  
To embrace without fears  
We will kiss with our eyes  
We will sleep without tears.  
If we only have love  
With our arms open wide  
Then the young and the old  
Will stand at our side.  
If we only have love  
Love that's falling like rain  
Then the parched desert earth  
Will grow green again.  
If we only have love  
For the hymn that we shout  
For the song that we sing  
Then we'll have a way out.  
If we only have love  
We can reach those in pain  
We can heal all our wounds  
We can use our own names.  
If we only have love  
We can melt all the guns  
And then give the new world  
To our daughters and sons.  
If we only have love  
Then Jerusalem stands  
And then death has no shadow  
There are no foreign lands.  
If we only have love  
We will never bow down  
We'll be tall as the pines  
Neither heroes nor clowns.  
If we only have love  
Then we'll only be men  
And we'll drink from the Grail  
To be born once again.  
Then with nothing at all  
But the little we are  
We'll have conquered all time  
All space, the sun, and the stars.

— 1968 original soundtrack audio (skip the ad):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M9ILw3D5yrU>

