

## Getting back to basic values

**Colin Read: Everybody's Business**

August 16, 2009 03:24 am

— The numbers on Wall Street are improving. This financial fiasco has been painful, but perhaps we can now look toward a better economic day. It is too bad that as the financial fiasco ends, political fiascos begin.

The financial meltdown demonstrates once again the amazing dichotomy that is the United States. Its dual personality sometimes shows Yankee ingenuity and steadfastness, and at other times a level of optimism, risk taking, entrepreneurship, and exuberance universally admired but rarely matched.

The art of economic recovery is to translate our recent pain into long-term gain. Just as the economy is showing green shoots, a new political economy must also sprout.

Twenty-five years ago, we began to ride the wave of the Reagan deregulation revolution. Now, the country must find a path that the North Country has known for much longer, and never abandoned. The rest of the nation must replace a troubling zealotry with practical solutions that will provide a much more robust and resilient foundation to our economic future.

Such economic regime changes are always challenging. The Roaring Twenties, the Frenetic Forties and early Fifties, the Sensational Sixties and the Exuberant Eighties were all eras of almost unbridled optimism. But each new high was followed by new lows, creating recessions and depressions in the Dirty Thirties, the Sullen Seventies and Troubling 2009.

While we suffer economic displacement with each transition, we emerge with institutional, political and economic innovations. We evolve, translating stressful challenges into innovation and resiliency.

If we are able to adapt without too much resistance to change, we find ourselves the better for it. There's something liberating about recent losses that trigger our reversion from a free-wheeling ideological era to a more thoughtful and pragmatic one. We become unshackled by our desire to preserve what is already lost, and are left bound only by our imagination. This is one such era.

The frustrating thing about our current transition is the unusually high degree of political partisanship. Today should be an opportunity for cooperation as we all recognize past follies and try to divine a shared economic foundation. But while President Obama's honeymoon period quickly ended, and rightly so, our politics has unfortunately returned to bare knuckle street brawling.

Such silly antics are typical at times and in organizations when the stakes are low. This is not such a time.

Instead, we need to understand what went wrong, without finger pointing, and collectively come up with a strategy that is good for Democrats and Republicans all. And we must check extreme partisanship at the door.

The North Country can teach the nation something at this moment. We are a region that is not particularly

partisan, and is relatively united on an almost libertarian sense of tolerance. This tolerance, in a land where people mind their own business, creates social liberals that are nonetheless fiscally conservative. We see outside activists come and go, and we don't bat an eyelash or buy in to their politics of the periphery. We focus not on special interests, but rather on the interests of our children, our countryside and our collective future.

The unique North Country values flow from our long history and our rural tradition. We have the elbow room to do our own thing, which has bred an acceptance for others to do their own thing. Our rural heritage also taught us to work hard during the growing season so we can maintain during the winter.

We also realize the need to work together in recognition of our interdependence. We know what is good for one can also be good for all. Most all of us meet each other's success with joy rather than jealousy.

And so, we reject the politics of division that so characterizes Albany and Washington politicians. We don't send our leaders to Albany or Washington to tow the party line. We instead prize those with open and independent minds that personify North Country values of tolerance and hard work.

And all the while, we recognize the importance of preserving for our children the beautiful and bountiful environment we have all enjoyed. We are united in the pragmatic pursuit of something for which we can all agree. We share a vision of a North Country that is a land of greater opportunity, enhanced beauty, and an early adopter of ways that can make us more sustainable and independent. As we create opportunities that allow careful growth, not for growth's sake, but to afford our children a chance to remain in the North Country, we preserve our quality of life and afford for our children the lives we have ourselves enjoyed.

If we are to preserve North Country opportunity, we must avoid the ridiculous political rhetoric and fruitless battles that are all too common at the state and national level. The pursuit of North Country happiness offers a lesson to our nation.

For instance, our balance and independence defies the stranglehold of party politics. Few of us blindly accept the entire platform of either party. And regardless of party affiliation, we are able to talk to each other and respect each other's views. We are a tolerant land of steady habits and independence.

Nor do we vie for more than our fair share of the pork barrel. Indeed, we'd rather be rid of the pork barrel altogether, and succeed based on our strong work ethic and viable economy.

To the North Country, it is about economics, not the depressing politics as usual. It is about free and clear thinking, not toting the party line. And it is about always striving to make the future even better than the past, not in repeating the past, over and over again.

In other words, the North Country is about taking our destiny into our own hands. That does not mean we must reject help from outside. Rather, we should accept help when a stronger North Country also makes for a stronger country.

These are the ideals of the North Country. We will continue in our open and independent ways, by building partnerships and jobs across borders and political boundaries, and by producing goods shipped around the country and around the world. We will do so by working together rather than engaging in the politics of usual that has so debilitated this state and the country. If the rest of the country can master this simple principle, it too can thrive.

**Colin Read runs Economic Insights, a local economics consulting firm, and teaches economics and finance at SUNY Plattsburgh. His fourth book, "The Fear Factor," has just been published by Palgrave**

**MacMillan. He can be reached at [economicinsights@gmail.com](mailto:economicinsights@gmail.com).**

Copyright © 1999-2008 cnhi, inc.