

SUNDAY July 2, 2023

GUEST COLUMN - OPINION

Sustainability advocate: Society must work together and serve the common good

**David Kyler, Center for a Sustainable Coast
Guest columnist**

Sustainability, essential to humanity's future on Planet Earth, can only be achieved if we are guided by a moral imperative that unifies enlightened self-interest with our collective welfare.

Of the multiple challenges America now faces, one is most fundamental: achieving a responsible balance between individual freedom and urgently needed pursuit of the common good.

Our nation's future has been repeatedly threatened by self-destructive periods of neglecting the public interest – intentionally or not – when our sense of liberty is degraded by divisive antagonisms, especially when fueled and exploited by callous, power-hungry leadership, in both the private sector and public.

In part, this unhealthy pattern stems from a misunderstanding of the country's legacy, founded in rebellion against abusive authority, which established sanctified status of the individual. It has been further distorted by excesses in the American character derived from rhetoric praising self-sufficiency, famously captured in Emerson's "Self-Reliance." This preoccupation with individual pursuits has weakened social cohesion as well as respect for the crucial role of government in advancing justice and equality.

Compounding these interwoven disruptive influences is the historical record of harsh injustices imposed on African Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans, and other ethnic minorities – both here and abroad – too often shamefully condoned and implicitly sanctioned by institutions professing devotion to the dignity of human life.

As a nation, our struggle with these protracted hypocrisies now culminates while we confront other profound challenges that

must be overcome. Any path forward requires that America finally cast off this chronic tribalism, now being propagated anew through self-destructive acts of partisan delusion that threaten our democracy.

These circumstances demand us to question how we apply our individual abilities – whether to fabricate and defend unfounded assertions that victimize scapegoats unfairly blamed for alleged deprivations, or to insightfully reexamine and revitalize our commitment to the unifying ideal of collective strength through diversity and equality.

Despite the sacred bonds of society being frayed by the reckless turmoil of selfish agendas that thwart humanitarian principles, we can – and must – resolve to advance America's founding aspirations – extinguishing the malignant perils of exploitation, distrust, and violence – by healing our nation through the disciplined practice of respect for our common humanity.

Many now wonder if it is still possible to restore America's aspiration to cultivate a durable, equitable future. The answer largely depends on our collective ability to honor the life-enriching interconnections and interdependencies among humans – not only fellow Americans, but all who share the blessings, and limitations, of Earth's prolific but vulnerable abundance.

We must now thoughtfully dedicate our liberties to prescribing and diligently serving the common good.