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The world is coming around

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‘Nattering nabobs of negativism’ is probably the most enduring of the many alliterative pronouncements of Spiro Agnew, vice president in the Nixon administration until forced to resign because of corruption. This particular phrase, penned by Nixon speechwriter William Safire, derogatively denigrated diligent reporters for placing bad news above good.

Why, Agnew asked rhetorically, did the malicious media not put priority on the positive? He attacked “pusillanimous pussyfooters” allegedly allergic to America.

Inspired by the positive points of the spirit of Spiro “Good News” Agnew, below is a list of definitive developments that definitely deserve dissemination and discussion.

First, democracy is becoming the accepted way of life for the world’s population overall, not just the privileged few. As recently as three decades ago, the people of Latin America lived almost uniformly in various degrees of authoritarian regime.

Today, Castro’s Cuba is literally the only remaining dictatorship in the Americas. Despite pervasive state control, and an internal security apparatus that is rightly respected and feared, the increasingly desperate need for foreign investment is forcing Havana’s geriatric communists to loosen their iron grip.

Even autocratic Hugo Chavez of Venezuela had to face the voters, and near the end of his rule lost on occasion. Once tiny Costa Rica was a beacon of freedom south of our border. Now that light spreads throughout the Americas.

Likewise, reasonably honest and genuinely contested elections are spreading in Africa, Southeast Asia, the former Soviet Union and — on the local level — in China. In global context, the dramatic “Arab Spring” therefore is the latest manifestation of a worldwide drive toward fair representative government.

The Korean peninsula is especially instructive in this regard. While attention is focused on the apocalyptic rhetoric and brutal actions of the North Korea regime, South Korea continues remarkable positive economic and political progress.

South Korea’s duly elected first woman president, Park Geun-hye, was inaugurated at the start of 2013. She is the daughter of late President Park Chung-hee. When she was very young, her mother was shot

and killed by a North Korean assassin aiming for her father. Despite past trauma, she seeks cooperation with the North, extending a stable hand of friendship.

Second, market economics likewise is spreading, as alternative ways of producing wealth and prosperity are discredited. Deng Xiaoping's declaration of "People's Socialism" for China in 1992 has become a benchmark event for not only that nation but the Asia region as a whole, and beyond.

The Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement between mainland China and Taiwan is a historic result of the free market economic revolution. Virtually all economic barriers have come down. In consequence, Taiwan's role as source of investment, trade and expertise is vastly expanding.

Third, remarkable global progress proceeds from a base of extraordinary growth in economic production. Yale Historian Paul Kennedy, in "The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers," notes total world industrial manufacturing rose from an assigned base level of 100 in 1900 to 3041.6 by 1980.

In industrial nations, the average human lifespan doubled in the 20th century. For more on the improving human condition, consult the Cato Institute's volume "It's Getting Better All The Time," by Stephen Moore and Julian Simon.

As these developments imply, free competitive economies and open competitive elections are interconnected, historically and currently. Adam Smith's classic "The Wealth of Nations" appeared in 1776, the year the American Revolution began.