

Arthur I. Cyr: Good news for the New Year - and beyond

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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 Richard 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, Fidel Castro's Cuba is literally the only remaining dictatorship in the Americas. Despite pervasive and ruthless state political control, the increasingly desperate need for foreign investment is forcing Havana's geriatric communists to loosen their iron grip. Reestablishing long-severed diplomatic ties with the U.S. is one result.

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, Asia, the former Soviet Union and - at least on local levels - China. In global context, the dramatic tumultuous "Arab Spring" overall is partly a manifestation of the worldwide drive toward fair representative government.

Japan has largely remained out of the headlines, overshadowed by sometimes ominous news regarding China and other nations. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has responded to uncertain developments in the United States by reiterating strong personal commitment to our strong democratic alliance.

Japan's economy continues to be one of the largest, most productive on Earth. Abe is giving priority to opening the economy.

Indonesia, the world's largest Islamic majority nation, is extremely important in strategic terms. The government is stable, a firm U.S. ally, effective in combating Islamic terrorism. By contrast, during the mid-1960s apparent drift into the Soviet orbit encouraged American military escalation in Vietnam - a crucial factor rarely mentioned today.

Second, market economics is spreading, as alternative economic systems fail. Deng Xiaoping's 1992 declaration of "People's Socialism" for China has become a benchmark event for not only that nation but the vast Asia regions overall, and well beyond.

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

Third, global progress proceeds during extraordinary long-term 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. This transformation in quality of life is described in the CATO Institute's "It's Getting Better All The Time," by Stephen Moore and Julian Simon.

Undeniably, 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.