

Good news for a new year ... beyond

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January 2, 2018

"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.

- 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 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. Tiny Costa Rica was once the beacon of freedom south of our border. Now that light spreads throughout the Americas.

Likewise, reasonably honest and contested elections are spreading in Africa, Asia and the former Soviet Union and – at least locally – China. In global context, the dramatic, tumultuous and violent "Arab Spring" has been partly a manifestation of the worldwide drive toward fair representative government.

Japan and South Korea are somewhat overshadowed by negative nuclear news from North Korea. That is unfortunate.

Japan Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has responded to uncertain political developments in the United States by reiterating commitment to our alliance. Japan's economy continues to be one of the largest, most productive on earth.

South Korea President Jae-in Moon has impressive credentials, including military service and human rights activism. This other democratic Asia economic powerhouse remains committed to the U.S.

Indonesia is the world's largest Islamic majority nation. The government is stable, a firm U.S. ally, effective in combatting terrorism. By contrast, during the mid-1960s drift into the Soviet orbit encouraged American military escalation in Vietnam.

- 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 that nation and more the vast Asia region, and well beyond.

The Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement between mainland China and Taiwan is an historic result of the free market economic revolution. Major economic barriers have come down. Regionally, Taiwan's role as source of capital, expertise and investment is important despite Taiwan Strait tensions.

- Collectively there is extraordinary continuing growth in economic production.

Yale Historian Paul Kennedy, in "The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers," notes total world manufacturing rose from an assigned value of 100 in 1900 to 3041.6 by 1980. This long-term trend continues.

In industrial nations, the average human lifespan doubled in the 20th century. Stephen Moore and Julian Simon describe this transformation in quality of life in the CATO Institute's "It's Getting Better All The Time."

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.