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Congratulations! You won the Nobel Prize!

By Ron Kitchens
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It seems like just yesterday Time magazine named us all the "Men and Women of the Year," and now we have, or should I say our president has, been given the Nobel Prize for what best can be described as hope.

I know much has been written about the president receiving this honor and whether it is deserved, but I am not going to add to that debate.

The truth is, I don't think the august body that votes on the Noble Prize (truth is, I don't have a clue who these people are) really awarded the prize to the president. Rather, I believe they awarded the prize to America by recognizing the office of the presidency not for what we have done, but because they know deep in their hearts that the greatest hope for the world lies not in the radicalism, antihumanism, tribalism, socialism and all the other -isms that seem to be the current fad these days.

Yes, this august body is smart. They know the greatest hope for the world is the fundamental, core belief of the United States of America — freedom.

I have traveled out of the country several times this year, and Southwest Michigan First has hosted a significant number of international delegations. I realize, without exception, that our new international friends believe America to be moving back toward the nation of their dreams.

When I ask them what specifically they admire about where we are headed, the answers seem to fall into five categories: democracy, respect for individual rights, economic opportunity for all, faith in a higher power and safety. It seems to me that these are the same principles that our great nation was founded upon 233 years ago, without much change.

But how can that be? We are inundated with media telling us the world opinion of America is now so much higher because of all that has changed. The truth is nothing fundamental has changed. America is still much like the shining city on the hill that serves as a beacon to those that want freedom.

We are still the only nation in the world where you can truly earn the rights and privileges of citizenship. You can move to England, but you will never be English. You can become a citizen of China, but you will never be Chinese. But come to America and earn the rights of citizenship and you are indeed an American. Period.

America is still the place that “holds these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal; and that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” No election of new leaders can enhance our inalienable rights, nor can an election take them away.

What our detractors don't understand about us is that we fundamentally believe in the power, importance and greatness of each other. We believe in change. Heck, we guaranteed it by ensuring that we would always be no farther away than the next election from change.

Democracy, although messy and loud and sometimes no fun at all, makes certain our unified commitment to the kind of change that surprises our detractors, excites the oppressed and earns us awards that no one seems to be able to define.

So congratulations America for the 233 years it took you to be an overnight success.

Ron Kitchens is CEO of Southwest Michigan First in Kalamazoo and an exclusive columnist for Business Review.