

It's time to believe in America again

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HAMID R. TAVAKOLI



WHEN JULY approaches, I experience conflicting emotions. On one hand, I am thrilled and excited with the Fourth of July holiday approaching. But on the other hand, I have to be very guarded and be on my A-game at work.

I look forward to Independence Day and highly enjoy celebrating this patriotic holiday, during which I am usually lounging in some body of water impatiently waiting for a dedicated family member or friend to finish cooking up the burgers and hot dogs on a grill nearby. What's

not to love?

At work, however, the relaxed and laid-back scene does not exist. Every year around this time, teaching hospitals across the country get their batch of new medical students, interns and residents.

Having been in the business of training future physicians for nearly two decades, I am very familiar with the fact that the residents were interns and the interns were students just days before. It's an anxious time of year.

During resident orientation recently, I reminded my new residents that while their most difficult year, their internship, is behind them, this year will not be a cakewalk — expectations will be higher, and room for error much less. Nonetheless, I reassured them that I will be here to support them and will be overseeing their work and patient care closely. Nobody is perfect — they will make mistakes. We all do, at some point.

I promised not to judge them based on their mistakes this early in their training. If they promise to always work in the context of integrity and respect toward their patients and colleagues, to move forward with empathy, then they will have nothing to fear from me. If they believe in themselves and their good intentions, they will not fail.

In 2009, I wrote a piece for The Pilot regarding the Fourth of July. In it, I explained that America is not just a nation — it's an idea, a way of life.

Much has happened in the past eight years. Anyone who watches TV news might think the sky is falling. Everything is awfully awful. We are dreadfully down on our country and where we see ourselves in the world. We assume that there are threats to our being in every corner of this planet. Although I by no means dismiss the threats abroad, I fear that the biggest threat to our nation is us. It's as if we don't believe in ourselves anymore.

We don't trust that our intentions are good. The entire notion of "the greater good" is lost. Any ounce of mutual respect across political parties has vanished. Our elected officials seem to have lost sight of the fact that in every relationship there must be give and take. How can this be?

On this Independence Day, let's remember that we live in the most free and prosperous nation in the history of

the world. In order to keep it that way, each person needs to sacrifice something for the whole. Just as I explained to my residents that nobody is perfect, so is no nation perfect.

Despite its imperfections, the sincere image of America is one of selflessness (look at our constant involvement in recovery efforts after any disaster around the globe), and problem-solvers (our long list of innovations in every sector of society). I truly believe that this nation is special. We must keep it that way.

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