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## COMMENTARY

Palaima: Fight humanity's baser instincts

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The French have a saying, "The more things change, the more they remain the same." I wonder how many of us believe that anymore.

When Greek historians and political philosophers used the verb "neoterizo," literally meaning something like "new-ify," it generally had negative connotations. The ancient Greeks were deeply suspicious of innovation. It required doing violence to the established ways of doing things. And their ways of doing things had been established at a price, only after violent struggles between rival political groups, noble clans fighting for power, rich and poor set against one another.

My father passed away in early September. Among his personal effects were many black and white photographs showing how things were after World War II, when he, like so many veterans, came home to the woman he loved. He and my mom were children of immigrants, from Lithuania and Poland. My beloved paternal grandparents could not even read and write. My parents, both proud to be high school graduates, took advantage of federal government programs that helped working class people like themselves build solid lives for their families.

One photo shows me in 1954, at age 3, pointing toward our first round-screen black-and-white television set. I thought of that photograph when I watched the clips of Fox and Friends co-host Steve Doocy vilifying Al Gore with the sarcastic remark: "What do Al Gore, Yasser Arafat and that crazy Jimmy Carter have in common? They all won the Nobel Peace Prize!"

Back in the '50s and '60s, all we had were three national TV networks. None of the distinguished news anchors we watched would ever have called a former president crazy, particularly a man who has devoted much of his post-presidential life to community service with organizations like Habitat for the Humanity, which builds homes for the poor.

Those anchors would have understood history enough to know that Arafat of the Palestinian Liberation Organization shared his Nobel Peace Prize in 1994 with Shimon Peres and Yitzhak Rabin of Israel for their truly noble attempts to break through the cycle of hatred and violence in the Middle East. Seven years later, Peres explained his own continuing aims nobly: "I think it is in the interest of all of us to see this region departing from blood and smoke and fire, into a reasonable peace under blue skies, that will enable the children to live without any fear or any dread." In 1994, it took political courage on both sides of the Middle East dispute to try to do something revolutionary for Palestinian and Israeli children.

A good friend, Austin lawyer Claude Ducloux, past winner of the Frank Newton Award for statewide pro bono efforts, uses a great metaphor to describe the polarizing "newification" of our society. He is a conservative, a friend since law school of Sen. John Cornyn.

According to Claude, "the way things have changed politically is like this. When I used to drive north on Loop 360 to the Arboretum I was in the righthand lane all the way. Now they have built so many new lanes to the right of me that by the time I reach the Arboretum, I am in the center of the highway. By adhering to my old, true conservative values, I am now in the political center."

Drivers in those new lanes have their very own news, with hosts like Doocy. They never have to change lanes, or channels, or look over at the cars traveling alongside them.

As for Al Gore's Nobel Prize for raising awareness about global warming, Doocy seems not to have read President Bush's White House press statement of June 11, 2001: "The issue of climate change respects no border. Its effects cannot be reined in by an army nor advanced by any ideology. Climate change, with its potential to impact every corner of the world, is an issue that must be addressed by the world."

Gore is making that happen.

As we strive to lower Earth's atmospheric temperature, let's hope we can raise the standards in news programming that panders to our baser instincts.

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