

# Rep. Vruwink: Despite disruptions, our democracy remains strong

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Over my past three terms in the Wisconsin Legislature, I have earned a reputation as the resident historian. During debate on the Assembly floor, I add a historical perspective to the issue at hand. Understanding our past helps us understand our present and guide us in decision-making that will affect our future.

The United States has a proud tradition of the peaceful transfer of power following presidential elections.

The presidential election of 1876 was one of the most contentious in American history. Its outcome required negotiations and compromise between Republicans and Democrats.

In that election, Samuel Tilden won 51 percent of the popular vote, while Rutherford Hayes won 48 percent. Because of allegations of electoral fraud, election violence, and disenfranchisement of Black voters, the two parties reached what is known as the Compromise of 1877. Republican Hayes became president in exchange for withdrawing federal troops from the Democratic South.

Traditionally, the losing candidate graciously concedes the election to the winner. In 1960, when Vice President Richard Nixon lost the presidential race to Sen. John F. Kennedy, Nixon wrote to Kennedy: "I know that you will have the united support of all Americans as you lead the nation in the cause of peace and freedom in the next four years."

In 1976, President Gerald Ford conceded to Georgia Gov. Jimmy Carter with these words: “I congratulate you on your victory ... I believe that we must now put the divisions of the campaign behind us and unite the country once again in the common pursuit of peace and prosperity.”

In 2000, then-Vice President Al Gore, a Democrat, conceded the election to Texas Gov. George W. Bush in the middle of a long ballot recount in Florida. Democrats were not happy with the concession, even though the U.S. Supreme Court had already put an end to the recount.

As vice president, Gore was responsible for certifying the results of the presidential election in a joint session of Congress. Democratic members of Congress objected to the certification, but Gore reminded them that he was abiding by the U.S. Constitution.

At the end of the two-hour proceeding, Gore said, “May God bless our new president and new vice president, and may God bless the United States of America.”

As many legal scholars have noted, nothing is more important than the integrity of the electoral process; the right of every eligible American citizen to cast a vote; to have that vote properly counted; and to have a peaceful transfer of power based on those election results.

The only time in our nation’s history when there has not been a peaceful transfer of power was on January 6, 2021, when backers of incumbent President Trump stormed the U.S. Capitol, battled with police officers, damaged property, and damaged our nation’s reputation. After a recess, the joint session of Congress completed its duties and President Biden was certified as president.

As a state legislator, my overriding priority is to bridge the partisan divide and encourage my colleagues in both parties to work together rather than work against each other. When I talk to people at their businesses and at their doors, they tell me they want government to work for the people, not the politicians. They want cooperation, not combat.

The people of Wisconsin want Democrats and Republicans to work together for the good of everyone. Wisconsinites want cohesion, not division; compromise, not gridlock; a balance of power, not power grabs.

On this coming Independence Day, let's remember that we all have a right to disagree, debate, and stand up for what we believe in. Vigorous debate makes our democracy strong. But debate should be civilized. There should be no violence in the halls of Congress.

This is the United States of America, not the Divided States of America. I wish you a safe and enjoyable Independence Day.