THE GREAT EXPERIMENT

 The United States of America was in crisis mode by late June, 2025. The first woman -- and also the first Third Party -- President had been sworn in on the steps of the Capitol just five months earlier. Because the Electoral College had since been legally eliminated, Lauren Fremont had won the office with a plurality of the popular vote from Democrats, Republicans, and her Third Party. Married and a mother of three children, President Fremont hailed from Bar Harbor, Maine. A former three-term state senator and genetic research scientist, she had run on a basic platform of simply trying to keep the country unified. The Red and Blue States, and their politicians, were tearing each other apart with uglier and uglier rhetoric, obfuscation, and even violent protests – all while the Media willfully whipped the flames.

 With serious cries for a Second Civil War by both sides, matters began to spin out of control when thousands of highly organized, armed civilian vigilantes began to descend on the inner cities of Chicago, Detroit, Philadelphia, and Baltimore, and began systematic “citizen arrests” of suspected gang members and drug dealers or anyone else caught with illegal firearms attempting crimes or murders. After each roundup, the police were duly notified to come and collect the criminals. When warned that such activism could be illegal unto itself, the vigilantes asked why the state militias hadn’t been called in to aid the police in what was clearly an out-of-control situation, with even innocent bystanders and children getting killed and wounded ceaselessly month after month. The beleaguered police had no answer, alluding that the inaction was a result of useless political posturing and impasse. So when the police in these urban areas refused to arrest most of the culprits and indeed had been ordered to release most of them, the disgusted vigilantes took the law into their own hands -- once the police withdrew --and began using their own weapons on the criminals. Thousands of thugs were gunned down, if they refused to disarm and surrender. It was a shocking bloodbath over a 48-hour period. Yet most of the law-abiding ghetto residents applauded the action, saying it was about time that they and their children could be safe again in their own homes, or walking outside, or going to school in their long-ravaged communities. The Governors of the states involved were finally forced to call in their National Guards, which stabilized the situation and let the vigilantes retire.

 President Fremont then dramatically addressed the nation. The country was ready to explode, with both sides blaming the other, she admitted. She appealed for calm and non-violence. But bold action was now absolutely necessary, she proclaimed. So the President called for a radical new approach to the growing divisions in America.

 “I propose that each state hold an emergency referendum vote, and decide once and for all if they are majority liberal or majority conservative. Those who are consigned as Blue States can band together, as can those who choose to be Red States. Once each state has decided, they are basically on their own. Federal control will be abandoned –except in time of international conflict – and power will be returned to the states. The Supreme Court, the FBI, and the CIA will continue their responsibilities. Interest on the National Debt will continue to be paid, out of our Federal reserves. I will remain as our elected president for the rest of my term only as our country’s representative abroad and now also as our United Nations ambassador. We will still vote as citizens together for President and Vice-President every four years as always. The U.S. dollar will remain as our national currency in both our Blue and Red states. But serious decentralization nationwide will take place over the course of one calendar year. Each state will control its own economy, jobs, taxation, education, medical care, insurance needs, police and fire protection, legislation, trade agreements, business practices, and maintain its current military bases. Every three years after the initial year, citizens may move from any one state to another. My goal is to provide every person with a choice to live exactly where they want and how they want, free of all Federal constraints. Your tax money will stay in your state, and will not be sent to Washington, DC anymore for redistribution. You will prosper or fail on your own merits and implementation. Frankly, I can see no other peaceful alternative to our dire political dilemma. I choose to call this revolutionary proposal ‘The Great Experiment’. May God bless us all, and I pray – as I am sure you do -- that it works. Let history be our judge.”

 To the surprise of few, Texas was the first to secede from the nation, and declared itself a Red/Conservative State. Its liberal capitol, Austin, was dismayed but helpless as the majority of Texans demanded their independence in the state’s referendum vote. Liberals could sell their homes and businesses and leave, or wait to do it after the three-year mark. Most stayed. The next states to go Red were Idaho, Montana, Wyoming and Nebraska, followed by Oklahoma, Kansas, North and South Dakota, Louisiana, and Arkansas. Meanwhile, Hawaii, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Vermont, and Rhode Island all voted to go Blue/Liberal. The cities of New York, Chicago, Seattle, Portland, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Atlanta, Miami, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Detroit, and Washington, DC all voted to remain Blue. But the problem here was that the rest of the non-urban populations of Oregon, Washington, Illinois, California, Florida, Georgia, Pennsylvania, Maryland, New York, and Michigan all voted majority to go Red. Rules, however, were rules, and Blue states they would be.

 Within the calendar year, all the remaining states went Red: Arizona, Alaska, Kentucky, Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama, North and South Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia, Indiana, Iowa, Ohio, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, Minnesota, Wisconsin, New Hampshire, Delaware, and New Jersey. Even President Tremont’s home state of Maine went Red. Colorado narrowly went Red, despite vocal opposition from more liberal Denver.

 The final tally was 35 Red states and 15 Blue. In regards to total votes, out of a population of 330 million, 260 million citizens were registered to vote. Out of that number, roughly 70 million citizens preferred the Liberal approach to government, while 190 million wanted the Conservative approach. The major cities and university towns generally tended towards liberalism, while the suburbs, small towns, and rural areas tended towards conservatism.

 Foreign governments compared the new reality of dealing with two Americas much as the ‘Brexit’ split between Great Britain and the European Union. Many people worldwide were fed up with the onslaught of globalism, mega-banks, the outsourcing of jobs, forced immigration, and a flurry of dubious bureaucratic rules from a central dictating agency -- often appointed and not even elected -- which seemed deaf to compromise and dissent. Under the new two nation system, international treaties (except for long-standing defense alliances) had to be re-negotiated. Lawsuits naturally followed, but those were expected to be tied up for decades. Our immediate North American neighbors, Canada and Mexico, had two different reactions: Canada remained neutral, and chose to trade evenly with both factions, while Mexico was vehemently against the split -- fearing chaos as illegal immigrants would be pushed out by the Red states, in turn leading to skyrocketing Mexican crime and brutal unemployment. Meanwhile, the Blue states combined their resources and called their new nation “Progress,” while the Red states united and called their new nation “Liberty.”

 In both new nations, state budgets were base-lined at zero. With no Federal income tax, state and sales taxes alone were responsible for maintaining each state’s infrastructure, hospitals, schools, airports, and other public services. President Fremont ordered the equitable release of all Federal monies to the states for the maintenance of Social Security, Medicare, and veteran benefits. Federal pensioners were guaranteed their promise for three years, but after that time, their chosen state of residence would be responsible for continuing the benefits -- if that state's financial circumstances allowed.

 The Governors of Liberty met with their state assemblies and senators and drafted a series of remarkable pronouncements: Every race, culture, and religion was welcomed in Liberty states, but all immigration had to be done legally, and English would be the only official language. Each Red state had to have a balanced budget. All elected leaders would have term limits, with just their names on the ballots and no political party designation. Trade between Liberty and any foreign entity had to be balanced equally. No lobbyists were allowed. Borders would be maintained by armed Liberty volunteer militias, done as a civic duty. (Because Liberty states had the majority of guns compared with the Blue states, this was not a problem.) New Liberty passports were issued, and a new flag was designed and flown above each Red state capitol alongside their old state flag. The new nation of Progress followed suit with their own versions of identity.

 Soon, some of the Red states voted in special elections to go even further. New homes were encouraged to be built with front porches, so as to facilitate relaxation and conversation with passersby. Towns and cities were to be linked with bicycle paths, to promote exercise for all ages. No internet service was to be offered daily from 9 p.m. to 6 a.m., to promote family togetherness and more personal, live social interaction and other leisure evening activities such as reading books. Adoption was promoted over abortion. Families were given tax incentives to have two or more children per family. Each family was given a cash voucher to choose the school of their choice for their children -- be it public, private, or religious. Churches were returned to one of their traditional community functions – distributing various types of charity for those in genuine need.

 After the first three years of The Great Experiment (and the re-election of President Fremont in 2028), people were allowed to move -- if they desired – from a Red state to a Blue state, or just within the new nations of Progress or Liberty. Because jobs were up in most of Liberty and crime was mostly down, it saw a substantial net gain in population. Liberty also scored a victory of sorts as Great Britain, China, the European Union, and Russia all signed most-favored nation trading status with the fledgling nation.

 At this point, the Blue states were beginning to panic. The populations of Oregon, Washington, Illinois, Florida, Georgia, Pennsylvania, Maryland, New York, Michigan, and California saw massive unrest as the city inhabitants were further pitted against their suburban, small town and rural inhabitants. A peaceful outcome needed to be decided by another referendum vote. Afterwards, only New York, California, and Washington, DC failed to join the exodus to the Red state column. New York City, San Francisco, and Los Angeles held a strangle-hold on their states, and DC was equally unmoved. Non-city dwellers in New York and California vowed to bail out when the next three year moving period was allowed.

 As a Blue retaliation of sorts, Hollywood movie and record producers, and companies such as Apple, Google, Facebook, Microsoft, CNN, and the New York Times, blocked all access to their products and services for all of the Red states. (Except for CNN, all other television and radio networks continued transmitting to both nations as before.) Amazon.com, meanwhile -- with a cold eye on their bottom line -- surprised everyone when it announced that it would sell and ship only to Red states beginning January 1.

 By now, the Red states had a majority of the best agricultural land of the former United States. It also had the means to produce the most electrical power. It had rich mines, forests, fresh water, and good rail, river, and road transportation systems. Its people were prospering, and its economy was strong. Meanwhile, the remaining components of the nation of Progress was teetering towards collapse, suffering food riots, energy blackouts, and soaring crime. The Blue states of Massachusetts, Connecticut, Vermont, and Rhode Island tried to help their suffering Blue state neighbors, but to no avail. Red states adjacent to New York, California, and DC beefed up their border patrols, and were even forced to issue “shoot to kill” orders against any breach. Former fellow Americans faced off with weapons, fear and mistrust. Catastrophe loomed, with imminent death and destruction.

 Yet disaster was averted at this fateful moment for the former United States when Islamic suicide terrorists from Iran detonated a suitcase-sized nuclear bomb in Boston’s Logan Airport on a snowy February 19, 2030. Tens of thousands of innocent men, women, and children were instantly killed, while deadly radiation was simultaneously released into the atmosphere. After war was quickly declared on Iran --which had supplied and publicly cheered on the extremists -- the citizens of both Progress and Liberty agreed that the two nations had no alternative but to revert back to being the United States of America again, one and indivisible.

 The Americans in both the Blue and Red states realized that they were better off together, in true civic cooperation and even in often messy compromise, rather than in competition and discord.

 And surely, somewhere, the spirit of Abraham Lincoln nodded his approval...

 THE END

 by Jack Karolewski

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