GRIDLOCK IN WASHINGTON: IS IT TRIBALISM OR THE FOUNDERS' INTENTION?

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I recently read an interesting and entertaining opinion about the long era of "right vs. left ideological conflict." The writer was Stephen B. Young of St. Paul, Minnesota who is the global executive director of the "Caux Round Table." With the current national legislative "gridlock" as a backdrop, this pundit observed that "where tribalism prevails, goodwill and innovative ideas are scarce …… when ideologies become fundamentalist …… they take on the vindictive character of tribalism."

This analysis brought me back several decades and an assignment while a student at Luther College. I remember studying and discussing the novel "Lord of the Flies" in which a group of pre-adolescent choir boys are stranded on a remote island. They attempt to govern themselves, but have disastrous results as they descend into savagery.

Young has his "tribalism" model which rejects the concept of sincerity in favor of irrational and emotional behavior. I think we should back off from this "experiment," and return to planet earth. There's a better explanation of this penchant for constant disagreement.

You might be surprised that I'm not totally frustrated by the gridlock we're experiencing. I am tired of the constant "pining" for the "good old days" when we always managed to "work things out." While I definitely see the advantages of achieving agreement on matters of policy and direction, I've come to understand why we seem to be more polarized now than in in the past. We've had very real cultural changes! And that has led to a different set of issues, or at least different perspectives on old issues.

The nature of the issues has quite naturally led to competing ideologies that are far, far apart. In this environment, it's difficult to achieve a compromise because that will only happen if each party gains something from the result, is able to claim "bragging rights," and has some feeling of satisfaction. Some things just don't lend themselves to that dynamic – and in those cases maybe we're better off if agreement isn't achieved.

Our Founders set up a legislative and governance process that includes requirements for debate, and procedural checks and balances. I believe they set up a system to protect against a tyranny of a thin majority and to make transformational change very difficult and messy. Reading the debates and writings of the time, we can see how today's legislative gridlock can be the natural and painful, but intended result of separation of powers and checks and balances. What has recently happened, like

it or not, is a return to restraining any governmental branch, political party, or rascally individual committed to acting unilaterally.

Was it one of the Founders' organizational creations that led to a necessary ingredient for creating agreement? And did that lead to a modern managerial concept. I'm not saying for sure, but that may be at least part of the history of a great concept – it's called "Win/Win." And with today's issues, arriving at "Win/Win" is very difficult! Let's acknowledge that reality before we spend all our energy criticizing.