

## Perspectives, Opinions, and Judgments

By: Louie V. Larimer

Do you have an opinion on Obamacare? Is the President doing the right thing by sending advisory troops back into Iraq? Do we need tighter immigration laws and border protection? Is the Benghazi incident worthy of further investigation? Did the Supreme Court get it right in the Hobby Lobby case? What do you think of gay marriage? What are the ethics of euthanasia? What do you think of the recent "botched" effort to execute a death row inmate?

If you live in Colorado Springs, do you support Colorado's recreational marijuana laws? Do you favor the Mayor, or the City Council President with respect to how our City ought to be governed? Should the Martin Drake Power Plant be decommissioned? Are you for or against the City for Champions proposal? These are a few of the questions that have been hotly debated and discussed at a Noon Roundtable Luncheon I attend from time to time.

During these spontaneous exchanges of opinions, I was reminded of the words of Mississippi legislator and former judge, Noah Sweat, spoken by him when he was forced to publically defend his position on the then still lingering controversial issue of alcohol regulation in 1952.

Here is what he said:

*"My friends, I had not intended to discuss this controversial subject at this particular time. However, I want you to know that I do not shun controversy. On the contrary, I will take a stand on any issue at any time, regardless of how fraught with controversy it might be. You have asked me how I feel about whiskey. All right, here is how I feel about whiskey.*

*If when you say whiskey, you mean the devil's brew, the poison scourge, the bloody monster that defiles innocence, dethrones reason, destroys the home, creates misery and poverty, yea, literally takes the bread from the mouths of little children; if you mean the evil drink that topples the Christian man and woman from the pinnacle of righteous, gracious living into the bottomless pit of degradation and despair and shame and helplessness and hopelessness --- then **I am certainly against it.***

***But if,** when you say whiskey, you mean the oil of conversation, the philosophic wine, the ale that is consumed when good fellows get together, that puts a song in their hearts and laughter on their lips and the warm glow of contentment in their eyes; if you mean Christmas cheer; if you mean the stimulating drink that puts the spring in the old gentleman's step on a frosty, crispy morning; if you mean the drink which enables a man to magnify his joy and his happiness and to forget, if only for a little while, life's great tragedies and heartaches and sorrows; if you mean that drink the sale of which pours into our treasuries untold millions of dollars which are used to provide tender care for our little crippled children, our blind, our deaf, our pitiful aged and infirm, to build highways and hospitals and schools, then **I certainly am for it.** This is my stand, and I will not compromise."*

Do these utterances of a southern state legislator constitute political doublespeak, the mumble jumble of a public official pandering for votes, and highly manipulative, sophisticated and refined rhetoric to dodge the issue?

Or perhaps, do they reflect the expression of a subtle, underlying, and unarticulated morsel of human wisdom that Sweat hoped we might discern in his words?

We all have opinions, make judgments, make attributions and try to influence others to our world view. We often wind up in hotly contested debates with ideological foes, arguing and advocating our points of view. Some of us get down-right intense, hostile, smug, and intolerant of the ideas of those who disagree with us.

But how many of us understand that in our ideological fights with others, there might be options, alternatives, perspectives, and insights that are unexamined and unexplored because we do not truly listen to others before responding and shouting over them?

The political, religious, and social dialogue in our country seems to have evolved to a point where acerbic, condescending, and self-righteous TV talk show hosts and commentators are glorified and rewarded for their highly emotional and mean spirited barbs at each other.

I wonder what ever happened to the finer art of true rhetoric, the nobler expression of ideas in that stimulate the intellect and touch the human heart in enduring and memorable ways.

I encourage you to re-read the words of Judge Sweat, and see if you can't get a better sense of what is deeply embedded in his message about "whiskey."