

The halves and the will nots

Our legislative branch is deadlocked, at a monumental impasse, split along ideological lines.

Americans have been divided for a decade or more into two almost equal halves – one wanting more government assistance for the people of this nation and the other perennially chanting a Garbo-like wail, “I want to be left alone.” Any scientist will tell you that when two forces of equal strength collide there is usually considerable energy released (and dissipated), friction generated and matter destroyed as a result. Any political scientist will tell you that the same is true in politics.

If our Congressional confrontations were all political theatre and had no real impact on our lives we could sell tickets and make some money from them. Unfortunately, their inability to listen to each other’s views and pass legislation that tracks with our avowed goals of living life, protecting liberty and pursuing happiness has gone well beyond the fail-safe point. It now threatens our very survival as a nation. Something’s got to give.

Crisis should never be the *decider*

In the recent past, the only way our elected representatives could be moved off their respective philosophical positions was a crisis like 9/11 or the threat of an economic disaster. Crises, however, should never be the catalyst or rationale for making enduring change, though they can serve as agents for finding short-term stop-gap solutions. How can we ever hope to find real common ground in a country where there are two polar opposite views on wealth (and the taxation and distribution of it), health (its quality, cost and coverage) and our collective responsibility for one another ?

It seems bewildering until you drill down into the bedrock of the American psyche. Then you begin to understand that at our core, we Americans believe in the inherent goodness of our fellow human beings; the desire of all people to be free; the preservation of our Constitutional freedoms (speech, expression, assembly, religion, etc.); and even the right to be left alone. But then we’re forced to ask ourselves, “if that’s the case, how do these beliefs square with the actions of our elected representatives?”

The one-step forward two-steps march backwards

Americans have shown they’ll march for civil rights, against war, for ending apartheid in foreign countries and the abolition of nuclear weapons. Why then are we unwilling to elect representatives to Congress and even presidents that are capable of putting their egos aside, sitting down with the *loyal opposition* (the ultimate oxymoron) and letting their dedication to the greater good of our society guide their actions?

Could it be that we’ve given up or lost our motivation and resigned ourselves to bad governance? Maybe we’ve been living under the illusion that a *middle way* would magically appear as an alternative to gridlock. It’s been said that if you keep to the middle of the road you’ll get run over, and given the state of our modern-day politics, that is probably the truest statement that can be made about our current political environment.

Political extremism

It may be that we’re no longer a nation that values moderation or compromise...that we’re an *all or nothing* society that feels it’s not how you play the game but whether you can win using any means possible that counts. Unfortunately, ‘any means possible’ usually creates collateral damage to those who can least afford it and whose only crime was being in the way. America’s needy cannot be *almost rescued* from drowning. Any new political direction we decide to take must focus on ways to bring them back from the water’s edge and keep them from re-entering the currents that could swallow them up forever.

On the other side of the coin, America’s wealthy should not be vilified for working their way up an economic ladder that was placed within their reach by a system that favors enterprise and industry, nor should they be expected to agree to a wholesale confiscation of their wealth to pay for government’s

mistakes. Just as surely as the poor didn't choose to be poor, the wealthy got where they are largely because the system rewarded their ingenuity and creativity.

There's only left and right left

America's long political odyssey has brought it to a T-intersection in the road. There's no viable third way forward. We must choose to go left or right of center, and we must also be ready to stand by our choices. Our country's future is too important to be decided by the apathy of either the know-nothings or the do-nothings among us. Those who choose neutrality, ignorance or inertia and who don't vote in November are guilty of being enablers of the very parochialism that characterizes our political class today.

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