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## Culture wars: short on common sense

Steve Bakke  June 6, 2023



More than 30 years ago, the concept of “culture war” was brought out of obscurity by sociologist James Davis Hunter’s book titled “Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America.” Some of the same issues remain today, but the list has grown geometrically.

Years later, political commentator E.J. Dionne concluded that for most issues the culture war was receding, and a new culture was emerging. He observed public opinion had changed regarding issues like gay marriage and other progressive policy advances. That was 2015, and contrary to Dionne’s speculation, intervening events really shook things up.

The transformative “perfect storm” of 2020 and 2021 exploded upon us. We experienced the COVID pandemic, George Floyd’s killing, and a presidential campaign involving controversial candidates. After the destructive violence across America during the summer of 2020 and the Capitol Hill break-in on January 6, 2021, we entered a new era of chaos, confusion, and division, much of it related to culture wars.

The country is soaked in outrage, usually originating at the extremes of political ideology. I’ve always believed that outrage leads to more wasted energy than positive results. And too often the moderate majority of Americans aren’t taking an active part in the debate. They quietly despair that our modern world has been “turned upside down.”

One battlefield of our culture wars was the recent debt ceiling debates. Most republicans claimed victory because the approved increase came with conditions attached. However, while the ceiling increase passed easily, far more democrats than republicans voted approval. That begs a question. With the republican conditions apparently more popular with democrats than with republicans, was the months-long bitter debate real or contrived?

Perhaps we didn’t have to wait months to get the debt ceiling issue resolved. Clearly, the extremes from both sides controlled the narrative. Even though these extremes are minority factions, they’ve become large enough and loud enough to dominate the choice of issues dealt with and arguments presented.

Was the recent debt battle really a “pretend” wedge issue? Was the moderate majority, both republican and democrat, quieted by intimidation and fear of the dreaded “cancel culture”?

Thankfully, there’s more common sense in America than the recent turmoil suggests. Common sense doesn’t have to be “old fashioned.” Its application can easily be forward looking and focused on modern issues and ideas.

The huge moderate majority of citizens could, if left to their own devices, effectively sort out most wedge issues. They know that regarding recent abortion issue developments, a great opportunity to quiet the debate was missed. Polls indicate a majority of Americans would have approved a compromise solution. Sadly, we’ve been left with a futile battle between extremes – unlimited abortion rights vs. the “under-no-circumstances” crowd.

This moderate majority understands that a border barrier combined with surveillance technology is the best way to sort out the problems at our border. Using common sense, they would do a better job of leading us through the labyrinth growing around the issue of gender/locker room/Title IX confusion. And they wouldn’t allow the idea of womanhood to become an abstract concept.

Most Americans understand the best pathway to clean energy must include nuclear power, the ultimate green energy source. They know the unrealistic cram-down energy policies of the far-left creates many battles but few results, except for economic ruin. And no commonsense approach to law enforcement could permit shoplifting havens.

Let the majority of Americans speak. Let’s let common sense take a few of these silly, divisive issues off our political plates so there’s more time for strengthening the economy, improving minority opportunities, making wise decisions as energy policy transitions, building respect and strength for our law enforcement capabilities, and so on.

In recent years, the interaction of politicians, extremists, and the voting public have brought out the worst in each other. Let’s avoid some of the often-nonsensical ideas by giving political voice to common sense. That will help moderate this chaos and ugliness and bring out the best in all of us.

Let’s avoid culture wars by giving voice to all Americans, not just the extremists. Relative peace will eventually settle upon many contemporary issues. Let us never again sheepishly whisper an opinion that “our world is upside down.”