MODERN POLITICS:
WHY IS COMPROMISE DIFFICULT
…… AND SOMETIMES IMPOSSIBLE?

Stephen L. Bakke – June 21, 2011 (My "Summer Solstice Report")

Constant Bickering and Gridlock Over Issues

Within this topic, you might be surprised at what I am tired of. It's not the gridlock – strange as that may seem. I'm tired of constantly hearing about how America has "deteriorated" into inflexible pockets of ideology. I'm tired of the shallow "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 have come to understand (I think) why we seem to be more polarized now than in the past. We have had very real cultural changes! And that has led to a different list of issues, or at least different perspectives on the old issues.

Certain issues come and go, solutions are debated, and legislation is actually passed. However, there are some other stubborn ones which seem to linger as non-compromised, unresolved issues which we hear about again and again – e.g. military conflicts, health care reform, Social Security reform, immigration, voter identification, union card check vs. secret balloting, definition of marriage, Israeli/Palestinian conflict, economic solutions, and that pesky abortion issue.

Minneapolis StarTribune - Paul Lachine - NewsArt

Face It – The U.S. Has Changed – Arguably, Not for the Better!

Extreme examples of cultural changes graphically demonstrate what has occurred in our society. I would argue that it wasn't many years ago that the certain characterizations would never have been made by prominent on-air commentators. They would have been unacceptable to the public or too radical to be taken seriously. For example, I submit two comments about "Weinergate" made by influential on-air personalities. While a bit cynical and "humorous" in nature, these were intended to send as serious commentary:

- Chris Matthews commented during a MSNBC "Hardball" program, that Democratic Congressman Anthony Weiner could be in danger of being forced out of Congress by Blue Dog Democrats who face uphill battles in red states because, as he put it, "people in

the rural areas of this country who are Christian conservative culturally - **you can say backward if you want** ... don't like this kind of stuff."

- CNN gave Bill Maher a platform to deride one of the Left's favorite targets: "Dick Cheney used to go out and shoot birds by the hundreds that were like in a cage. To me, that's **a lot more psychotic** than anything Anthony Weiner ever did."

Can you believe that? There was a time when those statements would never have been made by main-stream commentators. There was a time when an often "sleazy" comedian would never have been enlisted to provide supposedly "serious" commentary. **And** consider the unfortunate "editing" of the Pledge of Allegiance during last weekend's coverage of the U.S. Open golf tournament. During what was described as a patriotic presentation of values, a group of children were expressing their "Pledge." The edited version omitted the reference to "under God." An apology was issued but wrongdoing wasn't admitted. **What is happening?**

It's clear to me that this is symptomatic of a dramatic change/slide in our cultural rules and conventions. There is a significant percentage of liberals and progressives who truly have contempt for our culture and the legitimacy of our Founders' concept of "Divine Providence." You've got to admit, this demonstrates movement of one element of society,(and it ain't the "Right") to a far different reference point for interpreting our culture and judging our leaders' actions. I'm no model citizen or intellect, **but this concerns even me!**

Important Liberal and Conservative Philosophical Differences

Conservatives believe that liberals have more enthusiastically embraced this gradual evolution of culture than has the Right. Conservatives claim to have tried to hold on to a more traditional set of values. Following are some examples of what I believe to be dramatic cultural changes:

- Liberals have increased their resolve to prove that the federal government is the greatest tool for creating prosperity. Conservatives continue to believe the greatest threat to creating prosperity is government.
- Conservative philosophy, in its purest form, believes in government's role as defined, or limited, by the U.S. Constitution. Liberals are for an ever-increasing government role.
- Liberals consider the Constitution a "living, breathing document" – to be used in the context of international law, moral relativism, and moral equivalence. Conservatives believe the Constitution stands on its own.
- Conservative writer Dennis Prager envisions a new "American Trinity" developing. According to him, the traditional conservative "trinity" is "E Pluribus Unum, Liberty, and In God We Trust". He sees "E Pluribus Unum" being replaced by the concept of "Multiculturalism"; "Liberty" being replaced by "Equality", and "In God We Trust" being replaced by "Secularism". The familiar American motto "E Pluribus Unum" means "out of many, one". It represents our unity and is based on recognition of our inherent diversity. Liberals have come to interpret this as unity of thought throughout a diverse culture. Conservatives always have interpreted this as celebrating a common unique culture, not blurred by such things as multiculturalism.

- The Left has increased their focus on equality of the result. Liberals now tend to infer unequal opportunities when observing unequal outcomes – i.e. they believe equal outcomes result if people truly have equal opportunity. This is known as egalitarianism. The definition of equality for a person on the Right would emphasize the concept of equal opportunity.

Compromise Requires Certain Things

Getting back to the point of this report, when parties to negotiations find themselves far apart philosophically, compromise is often impossible. With some issues, there is no way to achieve "win/win." Any result which is different from the ideological extremes may not give a satisfying result for either party. In order to be an effective compromise, each party must gain something from the result, be able to brag about it, and provide some feeling of satisfaction. Can you see how some things just don't lend themselves to that dynamic?

An Example

Consider an example of a very contentious issue – abortion. Pro-life supporters commonly believe that a human life starts at conception and any termination of a pregnancy ends a human life. Pro-choice supporters argue against the certainty of that definition and support a women's right to choose whether or not to continue the pregnancy. They also argue that this right to choose (during the first two trimesters) is protected by the Constitution's "right to privacy" provision. That argument was upheld in the infamous Roe v. Wade Supreme Court decision.

The antagonists in this issue are both absolutely, sincerely adamant about the correctness of their position! The abortion opponents, quite simply, believe that terminating a pregnancy terminates a life. What would be the suggested compromise on that belief? The abortion rights supporters dismiss the concept that a fetus is a human life. They hold that the fetus is part of the mother and therefore it's the mother's right to choose. How should they compromise? There is no possible "common ground" that I can see! There is no way to create a "win/win" on this issue.

That's an easy example to contrast and explain. Now you try to create a "win/win" on some other issues. It's tough – sometimes just difficult, and sometimes impossible. Try analyzing the following issues and create a "win/win" satisfying compromise for both sides: war, health care reform, Social Security reform, immigration, voter identification, union card check vs. secret balloting, definition of marriage, Israeli/Palestinian conflict, economic solutions, etc ……...

The Final Analysis

Traditions aren't just questioned or examined, they are being cast aside. And as a result there is an understandable polarization over some issues which are important to our society and culture. You don't have to agree with my opinion that "non-compromise" is understandable, and if you do agree you don't have to like it. I only ask that you understand what I am saying and consider this as you evaluate future political conflicts. I think it will help you understand the dynamics of each situation.