

## **America's obsession with box-checking**

The ongoing argument over America's headlong plunge into the diversity pool is entering a new phase. As a young nation, we have always been enamored with 'firsts' having broken away from the rigid status quo and class system of our former colonial masters. Ever since the early days of our new republic we have had a love affair with breaking records and being 'number one' in everything we did, starting with the birth of our nation.

Determined to make our mark in the world and show foreign countries still clinging to monarchical governance that individual freedom and choices exercised through a Constitutional republic is superior to all forms of government, we have worked to be social and cultural pioneers that paved the way for a cross section of Americans' participation in all areas of our society.

Starting with the Emancipation Proclamation and the nationwide abolition of slavery (which admittedly was not a first for the world as Haiti was the first country to officially ban it) we worked to become more inclusionary and level the playing field of civil rights. Women's rights were next on America's agenda. Again, we weren't the first to do so. That distinction goes to New Zealand. In sports we competed locally, nationally and internationally and brought home gold medals and set many records in the Olympic Games. We were justifiably proud of our scientists, researchers and our military for their discoveries to save lives and, regrettably, to take them too, with the first use of the atomic bomb against civilians in Hiroshima and Nagasaki during WWII.

Being first on the moon opened new opportunities and pathways for space exploration. Our support for the ARPA (Advanced Research Projects Agency of the U.S. Department of Defense) program to develop and later fund the Internet back in the late sixties has changed how the world communicates. The thirst to be first in politics has naturally paralleled our lust for being number one in all other areas, but it is now becoming a destructive obsession.

Breaking glass ceilings or creating false barriers to break?

There were some firsts in American politics that were worthy of our praise such as those that saw the entry of women and minorities into the Congress, Senate, and even the White House. This reflected our concern of being under-represented by the diverse elements of American society, and it was a valid concern. Unfortunately, as with most things, we Americans were not content with breaking glass ceilings with candidates that possessed many diverse backgrounds and skills. We had to remake them into single dimensional figures that represented one thing and one thing only that could qualify them for inclusion into the Firsts Hall of Fame. Just being a woman or a minority wasn't enough. Been there and done that with bodies like the Supreme Court that now has three women on the bench, one of which is a 'woman of color' and one a Hispanic woman. We also have a Black male Justice, but as a male he no longer earns points.

The outward appearances, race or sex of our politicians or candidates is no longer sufficient to qualify them to be awarded a first or even an honorable mention. We now must probe deeper into a person's private background for other potential firsts that we think will enhance their 'social empathy quotient' and check an all-important PC box such as their sexual preferences or gender self-identification. The Secretary for Transportation, Mr. Pete Buttigieg, is the first openly homosexual Cabinet Secretary. Rachel Levine is the first biological male who 'identifies' as a female and has become Assistant Secretary for Health in the Biden Administration. Today, the Washington Post (Politics Alert of November 11th) has proclaimed Democrat Tina Kotek to be the winner of the Oregon gubernatorial race as "...one of the nation's first openly lesbian governors." In the old days of my youth a person's sexual preferences weren't something candidates put on their resumes or something they discussed with the press or shared with the voters. They were a private affair. We all respected "Don't ask. Don't tell," that is until Barack Obama tore the scab off and re-opened an already healing wound.

None of us needed to know who our leaders slept with, loved or had sex with. That was their business, and to be honest, as a voter I didn't WANT to know, just as I wasn't interested in what they ate or read or where they went to church (or didn't).

That has, apparently, all changed. Now anything and everything can qualify for a first in the first sweepstakes. The media is especially interested in 'combination firsts.' No longer is one first enough, it's imperative that we find *multiple* firsts among our politicians and future leaders. The elevation of one such candidate exemplifies that. Meet John Fetterman, a virtual cornucopia of firsts: first tattooed, bald-headed, goateed, 6'8", recovering stroke victim, husband of a bi-sexual woman, hooded sweatshirt-wearer and now Senator-elect from the State of Pennsylvania. Congratulations Mr. Fetterman for winning the firsts trifecta. It's going to take a really unique candidate to beat your combination.

Everything can qualify for inclusion in the panoply of firsts. Take Liz Cheney. She's the first daughter of a Vice-President to become a Congresswoman and first to lose her seat because of a bad political choice. Then there's the current Vice President, Kamala Harris who is the first woman VP, the first 'woman of color' to become VP and the first VP to declare North Korea an ally. The possibilities for new combinations are endless. I yearn for the days when firsts were really something to admire and the people that embodied them were exemplary role models for our children and our society as a whole. Please excuse me when I say it, but there is nothing special about being first in something that has little or no value.

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