

America's skepticism pandemic

If the Coronavirus pandemic has revealed one important truth to us these last 18 months it is that America's skepticism and mistrust of authority has reached new, unprecedented heights but is coming under increasing fire. We Americans have always run our cultural engine on regular octane skepticism of our authority figures going all the way back to colonial times. For centuries there has been an ebb and flow of support for our elected officials, captains of industry and politicians. Times of economic strife and war have served to pull us apart as a nation and we have expressed our anger or frustration at the ballot box to right those perceived wrongs, but never has our mistrust for those at the top of the pyramid of control been so virulent and so vocal as it is now.

The pandemic is not the only cause of this lack of faith or trust in our leaders. It is, however, one of the more recent straws that have broken the proverbial camel's back and has forced decent law-abiding people to choose which side of the health vs. individual sovereignty debate to come down on. As usual, the choices are binary either/or ones. Are you on the side of government that continues to reinvent or redefine the truth about the science and treatment of the disease or are you a staunch never-vaxx'er that does not trust bureaucrats to make decisions about our own bodies for us?

Skepticism is healthy. It is also morally defensible. And while it may make the task of governing difficult, it is a back-stop, preventing us from making rash judgments about our life's decisions. Used properly, it calls out the hypocrites and holds people's feet to the fire. It questions the status quo and the conventional wisdom and encourages us to replace lock-step, authoritarian-like politics with open and serious facts-based debate. In that debate, skepticism allows us to mix defensible data, research and heaping dollops of common sense together until we can eliminate our skepticism. That's not only a good recipe for personal decision-making, it's a winning combination for creating sound national health, economic and foreign policy to name just three key areas of good governance. It's also a formula we should employ to vet our politicians BEFORE they can do us too much harm. Unfortunately, that's not always how the important decisions are made or our candidates chosen.

The decisions that affect our daily lives on a macro level are frequently the result of powerful special interest pressure applied by big moneyed donors with ideological axes to grind OR politicians that care more about winning re-election than doing their constituents' business. Changing that dynamic and countering their influence can seem like an impossible task to the average person. That's why those of us who are average Americans need to wise up and realize that in order to markedly change the way we do business and politics we must 'turn' a few of the insiders in special interest organizations and members of the establishment towards the skeptics' way of thinking. After all, it's they who know the inner-workings of power politics and can help us change the paradigm.

Seeing the real light at the end of the tunnel; it's not always an oncoming train.

Skepticism can go too far just as it can fall short of stimulating debate or legislative action. There is a real and perceptible rhythm to it, and its practitioners can instinctively *feel* it and many are able to harness it rather than have it consume them. While most skeptics have a tendency to put up procedural roadblocks to slow down the pace of decision-making, allowing for more debate, there are those who abuse skepticism and use it to obstruct for obstruction's sake. They forget that sometimes the light at the end of the tunnel of their arguments is the real light of opportunity through compromise. Those are not the people who should be making public policy for us, nor should we support their efforts to act as our surrogates. Neither should we support those on the opposite side who would stifle debate or sacrifice the public's input for the 'greater good'. A case in point is the government's (both federal and state) handling of the Coronavirus epidemic vis-à-vis vaccination and masking policy, business lockdowns, travel restrictions, school mandates, etc.

Authoritarian control has destroyed healthy skepticism and it has also cost lives. Witness the deaths of thousands of Covid-19 patients who were forced into New York nursing homes with non-Covid residents as a result of NY Governor Cuomo's edict. This is but one example of the constant attacks on skepticism and free expression of disagreement that we are experiencing in nearly every aspect of our lives. Critical thinking is rapidly vanishing as an integral part of the American experience. Americans have willingly ceded their autonomy to a few public officials who are routinely abusing it. Those of us who have relinquished control without a fight have only ourselves to blame for the consequences and are on the destructive path outlined by Benjamin Franklin in his admonition: "Those who would give up essential liberty to purchase a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety."

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