

Fresno expert says way to remedy America's bitter politics is responsible civic life

BY JOHN MINKLER, DECEMBER 20, 2020

A new stewardship political party was recently proposed by Richard Johanson (The Bee, Dec. 6) as an antidote to the political gridlock and adversarial conflict between the two dominant parties. He wrote, "This group of non-confrontive centrists would be dedicated to restoring the stature of our nation to its former political dignity. The current conduct of extremists on both sides of our political aisle would become only dog-eared paragraphs in future history books."

Richard Johanson exemplifies patriotic stewardship, serving as a marine in WWII, building a successful business, and then volunteering as a civic leader. He is one of my mentors, but I respectfully disagree with his proposal. I share the concern for the damage done to our democratic republic by the divisive, adversarial political gridlock we see today. Our problems remain unsolved and our American values are forsaken.

We watched as our political discourse descended into tribal battles, with each side building their power and weakening their enemy. The extreme right and left factions pulled their tribe to seek extreme demands. Respectful dialogue, compromise and problem-solving diminished when our nation and community had multiple crises.

Albert Einstein said, "We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them." I suggest that we will not solve our civic crisis by creating another political party, but rather by raising the standard for what it means to be a responsible American citizen. We can hold ourselves and our elected leaders and political candidates accountable to the values that our veterans fought for in defense of our nation, including freedom, unity, and equal justice under law. We can deny support for public leaders who refuse to behave with civility and respect toward all citizens.

The Fresno Business Council, of which Richard Johanson is president emeritus, has developed 10 community values, including stewardship; "We will lead and follow as stewards of our region, caring responsibly for our community assets. We will work together to achieve the greatest, long-term benefit for the community as a whole."

Consider the value of holding the common good above self-interest. Our veterans and active-duty service people, law enforcement, firefighters, health workers, teachers, faith community leaders, and many others put duty before self. Most public officials and government employees are included, but there is growing disappointment with increasing polarization and disrespect. In 1958, public trust in government was 75%; now it's 17%.

Our Constitution begins, "We the People, in order to form a more perfect Union..." How can we renew patriotism among citizens, with a commitment to be stewards of our community, nation and world. The founders challenged future generations with the national motto, "E Pluribus

Unum.” We can affirm liberty and individual differences (Pluribus) and work together as one to solve our problems and achieve our goals (Unum).

I conclude with these words from Richard Johanson: “The millions who deeply love our nation and who would subscribe to the ethical and moral standards in our Constitution must come together. We need to return to conducting our political affairs within a national atmosphere wherein we can fulfill our governmental obligations with pride.”

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