

Political Leader Certification

It's Time to Demand Competency

By

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Much has been written over the centuries regarding the qualities necessary for effective leadership and exemplary public service. Almost everyone has a viewpoint on the matter, but rarely do we find political leaders that actually demonstrate the requisite wisdom, profile in courage, party independence and critical thinking skills necessary to inspire others toward the greater good. The overriding premise of our form of government is predicated on the presumption that the assembly of representatives that were elected by the voters not only possess a basic skill set of critical abilities but a willingness to independently express the concerns and needs of those they represent. Our republic is grounded in each representative's possession of specific intellectual qualities, strength of character, and knowledge, as opposed to just parroting the political views and agenda of their party leaders. It is probably safe to assume that everyone who casts their vote hopes that the person they supported for public office possesses the experience, civility, statesmanship, thriftiness, and intelligence necessary to do the job. In addition we all probably have an expectation that in addition to a suite of core competencies our public leaders also bring to their task of governance attributes critical to effective public discourse that includes compassion, integrity, humility, respect, and advanced reasoning skills.

As we just witnessed, we have a long way to go in finding one hundred senators who possess the courage, independence, and character necessary to reach the ideal plane. We watched helplessly as tribal forces sought to divide us as a nation along party lines (again), to convince us that no other possible option existed for an Associate Supreme Court Justice, and we were mesmerized as we experienced an all-out assault on our emotions specifically designed to persuade us that our fellow Americans were somehow disingenuous in their expressions of concern, no matter which side of the isle they occupied. As a nation we have been subjected to an extreme form of partisan rivalry that has manifested itself in divisive rhetoric, extremist views, name calling, the twisting or outright dismissal of the facts, and a level of incivility that has not been seen on such a scale since the McCarthy era.

What I found most alarming about this latest installment of polarizing politics is that it was created intentionally by a select few in order to supplant the better angels of public debate and reason. At last count there are approximately 26,300 judges in America presently serving on the bench and yet we were asked to believe that none of these people was qualified to serve as the next associate justice. Only this one man who has written extensively about protecting the President from wrong doing, who was accused of wrong doing himself by a "credible" witness, and who earned his credentials as a partisan operative was qualified to serve according to the powers that be. I find that assertion impossible to believe yet countless hours of media coverage was engineered to persuade us toward one point of view or the other.

We watched helplessly as another episode of the reality TV presidency unfolded before our very eyes, as both sides endeavored to distract us from the real truth by engaging their horde of publicists and political spin mongers who exaggerated their claims and encouraged us to take sides. The sad truth is, it worked yet again, and we continue to see it in speeches given by our leaders. During one of the interviews I watched near the end of this torturous ordeal I listened as another John Kennedy (the distinguished senator from Louisiana) hit the nail on the head as only he can when he said something to the effect that we not only reached the bottom, but we started digging. It's not quite up there with "ask not what your country can do for you", but I thought it was the most enlightening metaphor I have heard in quite a while about the current miserable state of affairs in American politics.

As a person who has devoted much of their professional life trying to teach critical thinking and multivariate reasoning to college students, I am dismayed by how politicians, on both sides of the isles, effortlessly gain the upper hand by dividing us as a nation and how they continually pit us against one another for their own self-interests. I can recall spending hours trying to come up with clever ways of showcasing the complexity of things believed simple at first glance, but which are in fact very complex. One of the models I used articulated seventeen factors that combined in a three dimensional logic model to determine how green the grass grows. Another attempted to point out that perspective is paramount in determining the truth and I used as an example, the fact we while we perceive that we are sitting still on the earth we are actually moving through space, in four different directions, at the same time, at an aggregate velocity of nearly two million miles per hour and yet we cannot detect this movement.

As I struggle to get my head around and understand how an entire nation can become the unwitting participants and victims of extreme political manipulation by a relatively small handful of seemingly unskilled thinkers, such as those who occupy the U.S. Senate and the House of Representatives, I become more convinced each day that the answer is simple and rests in the notion of professional certification of anyone seeking political office. Not unlike lawyers, accounts, doctors, or plumbers, it seems prudent to endeavor to assure a level of competency by enacting legislation that requires anyone running for public office to pass a test that measures their reasoning skills, knowledge of U.S. history, political theory and strategy, world affairs, mathematics, Constitutional law, governmental budgeting, organizational leadership, and perhaps even a section on their understanding of civility and compassion.

Just imagine if the majority of voters in the United States had the luxury of seeing a test score next to the name of each candidate that illustrates their knowledge and understanding of each of these disciplines and perhaps even an aggregate score that reflects their overall political leadership competency. That approach would help take the guesswork out of it, probably minimize the mudslinging, and give people a true measure of basic competency of each candidate running for office. It might even dissuade people who clearly are not qualified from running for public office.

Certainly, no such requirement will be voluntarily adopted by either political party, but isn't it about time that we demand something more from our politicians other than ambition?