

Democracy Is Coming

Introduction

You may wonder why a Drug Counselor would be writing about politics and how we chose our leaders. It is my opinion that who we choose to lead us, and how we prioritize where funding is allocated, are important concerns. In addition, politics are a reflection of our values. These values include what we stand for and how our citizens are treated. Why wouldn't the Drug Counselor talk about such things? Bringing people together and helping them to be viable members of society is part of my job. Healthy and welcoming communities create empowered community members.

Democracy Is Coming



The Silly Season will soon be upon us which means flyers, brochures, the knocking on doors and position statements from a slew of politicians. In addition, for the big races, TV commercials are not far away. While my lead-in sounds less than enthusiastic, the system we have in America, for all of its faults, still allows for opinion, choice and interaction. With all of this being said I would like to share a few ideas you might want to consider.

Many people view politics to be pretty slimy. I guess that's because we have lost faith in some of our politicians. I guess that is because Watergate, the Lewinsky scandal, a number of present sordid concerns about Russia and prostitutes, do not help matters. While voting for our leaders is a gift, and right, in this country—it is also something we, all too often, take for granted. Party Politics, personalities and our own pocketbooks play huge roles in who we vote for. Race, gender, religion, abortions, and stances on things like guns, etc., also impact our choices. Sometimes lost are facts. Sometimes lost is what is best for all. Sometimes lost is recognizing that our choices reflect how we are viewed by others. We have a great responsibility to take voting and participating in Democracy seriously. In many ways, we are choosing the most influential leader(s) in the world. We are also advertising Democracy as well.

Alexis de Tocqueville wrote two volumes which eventually would come to be known as *Democracy in America*. Many consider this book to be one of the best ever written about our country. Published in 1835 and 1840 Tocqueville offers insight into Democracy that speaks loudly even today. I mention this because, to a large extent, America is a work in progress. Since *Democracy in America* was written we have endured Manifest Destiny, Civil War, two World Wars, racial strife, impeachment proceedings, scandals and more. How and why these have been overcome has as much to do with a philosophical system with checks and balances, the amendment process, a fair election process, our free press, respected courts, all of which help create a sense of stability. Tocqueville saw much of this so many years ago.

One of the biggest challenges we have facing us today is disbelief. Sure there is Syria. Sure there is North Korea. Sure there are a host of economic concerns as well. Unfortunately, when we lose faith in our system, and its leaders, it is hard to rally behind a cause. We presently live in a time when our courts, media, the other political party, law enforcement and election process are being excoriated. We deserve better leadership than this. Unfortunately this can only be accomplished by our demanding it. We have to make it happen by listening to each other, learning about the issues and being open to compromise (when necessary).

On the state and local level deciding upon our leaders is (at least) as important as it is nationally. Choosing leaders that we see, interact with, and can become, is part of our Democratic foundation. Things can change far more quickly on the city and town level. Choosing leaders who can enhance and protect community is essential. Sometimes setting aside one's personal view is important for the 'all'. Local politics is where real Democracy can occur. It is my belief that local communities, when creating a climate of respect, help weave the basic fabric of this nation.

It must be noted, especially at local levels, that we recognize the time and effort put in to being on School Committees, Town Councils and a host of Boards/Commissions. For very little pay and lots of second guessing those who fill these spots are providing a valuable service. In addition, no party or individual, has come up with all of the answers and we can certainly use fresh ideas (that means you can run for office as well). Hopefully, folks will continue to fill these positions. Hopefully, most of us will remember that doing so is a big, and vital, undertaking. Take time to thank those who serve in the previously mentioned capacity. They had the

courage and stamina to support their communities. You might not agree with their stances –but the time and effort they offered must be acknowledged.

Do you want to elect uniters or dividers? Do you want to elect those who point fingers and blame, or those who offer hope? Obviously standing up to tough issues and concerns is a key part of being a political leader. So is creating a common vision that has room for many different perspectives. This takes patience and courage, mixed in with some wisdom. Can we discern these dynamics by hiding behind preconceived notions? Can we learn about the necessary considerations by merely speaking to like-minded friends?

Jon Meacham, in his new book *The Soul of America*, tells us that we have traveled like roads before. Perhaps the present time is a test. Perhaps it is all just a part of Democracy's evolution. Once long-ago Abraham Lincoln called on us to recognize our 'Better Angels'. Here is that chance once again.

November is really not all that far away. Before the candidates declare, perhaps it is time for us all to ask what do we expect from our leaders. We also should take a few moments to reflect upon what direction our communities should take. America means hope to many around the world. I hope it means the same for those living in this nation. We are part of a great idea. Choose well, it is a gift we give each other, future generations and the world. Just a thought. See you soon.

Bob Houghtaling

Bob Houghtaling was a former member of the Exeter West Greenwich School Committee, runs a Podcast called 'Mulling It Over' and loves the town of East Greenwich.