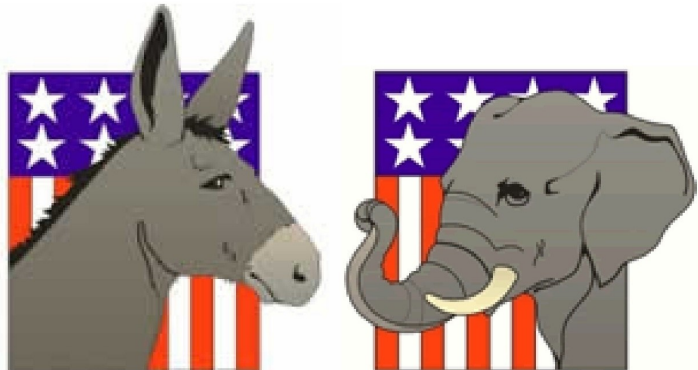


Neighborliness & Love

...Response to San Angelo
Standard Times Article by David
Currie...

by Ken Casper



David Currie, Chairman of the local Democrat Party, recently wrote an opinion piece in the San Angelo Standard Times on how our politics should show people they matter. What may surprise him and others is that we agree on just about everything—in principle at least. He accurately points out that today America is divided, then goes on to ask, “how we can overcome these divisions and survive as a great country?”

My response is: by treating each other with respect, by acknowledging that the other guy has a right to his opinion, as well as a right to express it. The best way to demonstrate that respect is by actually listening to him, by getting away from talking points and rote responses. It’s okay to ask questions and to challenge responses. That’s how we learn.

Dr. Currie outlined five points which I will address here.

(1) *“Religious liberty for all persons of faith or no faith.”* I totally agree. It assumes, of course, that the practice of one’s faith does not violate the rights of others, e.g., practicing human sacrifice. We also have to differentiate between theologically mandated practices and practices carried on by members of a particular religion. For example, one of the five pillars of Islam call for praying five times a day, if possible. Those last two words are important, because the requirement to pray doesn’t justify stopping traffic in the middle of Manhattan to kneel and face Mecca. Islam has a political/military component called Sharia which regulates virtually every aspect of Muslim life. Many practices are innocuous, like washing one’s hands and feet before praying, but some also violate our Constitution, as well as human rights, e.g., cutting off hands for theft, female genital mutilation and “honor killing.” Such practices cannot be tolerated in a civilized society.

(2) *“A fully funded public education system.”* Again we agree. Those who choose to attend public schools should get the tools they need to learn. Here’s where Dr. Currie and I disagree. My focus is on the student, not the school. Every child deserves a good education. For some it might be in the local public school, for others it might be at a different public school or in a private school, or it could be at home with a parent, guardian or private tutor. Like the GI Bill, education funds should follow the student, not force him or her into environments that are unsafe. It’s a disgrace, but there are bad public schools.

(3) *“A free press.”* Absolutely agree. Unfortunately, over the last decade especially, the media have become so partisan and unprofessional that it will take at least a generation for them to

regain the public's trust and respect. Journalism standards must be reestablished. Integrity and impartiality have to be taught in journalism courses and demanded by publishers as well as the public. I believe the current generation of reporters and writers has to pass away for that to happen.

(4) *"Fair taxation, including fair property taxes and a progressive tax policy in which those with the greatest resources pay the most."* Fair taxation? Agree. In fact I favor the Fair Tax plan, which does away with the federal income tax and the IRS. But let's not forget a flat percentage tax is by nature progressive in the sense that 10% of a million dollars is twenty times more than 10% of fifty thousand dollars. On the other hand, the progression of tax percentages doesn't so much raise revenue as punish success. Logic tells us punishing success is not a good thing. It will result in less success—or a black market of successes.

(5) *"Health care as a human right for every person."* Here is the one area where Dr. Currie and I disagree, not because I reject his desire to help people, especially those who are hurting. I want everyone to receive the health care they need. And yes, I'm willing to contribute to their getting it. But they have no right to demand I pay for it. Despite what our last president said, we are a Christian nation. We love our neighbors. We make sure everyone has the necessary access to emergency rooms and at least the minimum care necessary to sustain life, not as a means of state control, as it is in socialist and communist countries, but because of our Judeo-Christian values.

Let's also be clear about the meanings of words. A right is something that doesn't cost anyone else anything. So my exercising my First Amendment right of free speech doesn't cost anyone a penny. My second amendment right to bear arms costs no one anything. The right to protest, to practice a religion, etc. imposes no expense on anyone else. Let us not forget rights come from God and apply to everyone. Our Constitution doesn't grant us our rights. It only recognizes them. This is in contrast with entitlements which are granted by the state and can be taken away by the state. Cases in point: welfare and subsidized housing. Health care fits into this category, as well.

The danger of calling health care a "right" is this: Should a healthcare provider be forced to take care of someone on demand? What about medication? Should pharmaceutical companies be forced to provide drugs without compensation? If you believe the government has the right to force people to serve other people without their consent or compensation, you are justifying slavery.

The terrible irony is that on the other end of the life/health spectrum, there is a growing movement to deny life-prolonging treatment to those who are deemed "unproductive." Expensive medication and surgical procedures are being denied to senior citizens because, according to an actuarial table somewhere, they aren't expected to live long enough to justify the investment of time and resources, or because the patient's mental capacity isn't high enough. That's wrong and immoral.

Dr. Currie went on to say: *"I support the political party I believe is most committed to freedom of religion and freedom of the press."* I wonder if he isn't confusing freedom of religion with freedom from religion? John Adams said: "Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other." Yet the Democrats

rejected a statement in their party platform that would have acknowledged the existence of God. Instead they worship at the altar of Political Correctness. They didn't stick up for one of their own, Juan Williams, when he was fired from NPR in 2010 because he admitted on the O'Reilly Factor that dark bearded men wearing Arab dress in airports made him nervous. They're not for a free press when they stand for the so-called "Fairness Doctrine," which mandates what broadcast stations must present. When the government dictates what is permitted based on its perception of what is balanced, you don't have freedom.

"The party most supportive of public education and opposed to vouchers that will destroy our public schools and rural communities, benefiting only the privileged few." The children of South Chicago, definitely not among the privilege few, would benefit tremendously from the opportunity to change schools. I must add that I'm very disappointed in Dr. Currie's hauling out the old canard that Republican-sponsored changes to public policy help the rich at the expense of the poor. How do the rich benefit from vouchers? They don't need them. Their taxes don't go down because of them. This is one of those hollow, broadside accusations that lacks proof or merit. It serves only to perpetuate class warfare—divide and conquer—while earning the loyalty of teachers' unions. The voucher system worked very well in Washington DC until the National Education Association convinced President Obama (D) to cancel the 3-year-old program. Politics took priority over the welfare of children. It should be noted that the quality of American education has declined steadily and proportionately with the rise of teachers unions and the Department of Education.

"The party that strives to fund education at the state level and reduce our crazy property taxes." Whenever you raise an issue to a higher political echelon, you lose more control of it. If you don't like the way the local school board members are handling issues, do something about them. Kicking the problem upstairs only makes matters worse. Your taxes will not go down because you shifted control to Austin. They will inevitably go up, because that's the nature of state bureaucracies.

"The party that understands that \$15 an hour or \$31,000 a year is not a living wage." It's not supposed to be. Minimum wage is for unskilled, entry level jobs or jobs that provide additional opportunities to earn more income, like waiters and waitresses who earn tips. Raising the minimum wage sounds good, but it is an economic disaster, as Seattle has demonstrated. \$15 an hour is a job killer. Restaurants and other businesses have laid off workers and closed their doors, and the price of goods and services goes up. That impacts the poorest among us most. Not all jobs are created equal, nor should compensation be. Give employers and employees the freedom to decide what a job is worth.

"The party that believes that people deserve health care just as much as they deserve a chance at an education." As I stated above, health care is not a right, it's an entitlement. Everyone has a chance to buy health insurance. Let the free market reign.

The essential difference between Dr. Currie and me is that he believes the government is the solution to our social and economic problems, while I agree with Ronald Reagan that "The government is not the solution. It's the problem." There isn't a single thing the government does well, and the larger it gets the more inefficient and corrupt it becomes. Part of the solution of this

problem is to transfer as many government functions to the lowest levels of government as possible. The other part is to stop doing things the government has no business doing. Student loans, for instance. We have banks for that. Health insurance is another. We have insurance companies that are expert at insuring people. Obamacare has been a disaster. Not only does the nanny state cater to the least productive members of society, it makes society less productive. America was built on ambition, ingenuity and hard work. Those virtues are incompatible with socialism. As long as we remain faithful to our Judeo-Christian principles, American Capitalism will continue to make us, in the words of Ben Franklin, “capable of freedom.”

Dr. Currie concluded: *“Now, if you disagree with me on any of these matters, it doesn’t make you a racist or a mean person; it just means we need to talk about what it means to be neighbors. Let’s work at that, because everybody bleeds, everybody hurts, everybody dreams, and everybody needs – LOVE.”*

Amen, and Amen again.

Ken Casper was born and raised in New York City. He joined the Air Force, served in Japan, Vietnam, and Germany as well as various stateside assignments before retiring in San Angelo, Texas. An active member and past-president of the San Angelo TEA Party, Ken is also the author of more than twenty-five novels.

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