

Common Ground in Virginia

We all mourn the deaths of our Challenger astronauts. No Republicans. No Democrats. Just sad Americans. How bittersweet that it takes grieving for us to be one Nation Under God in spirit. Perhaps, we could pause in this moment after a national tragedy and before another horrible war. Let's stand on our common ground.

I take pains to point out the partisan differences between Republicans and Democrats in Virginia in a column in the Yorktown Crier/Poquoson Post. Yet, I see much that we share together. The Democrat columns written on alternate weeks illustrate how much is in common.

Frankly, as I read our local Democrat I agree with paragraph after paragraph until, sometimes in the last few sentences, I arrive at a point of departure. His discussion of public education and church-state relations, written from the Baptist view of the 1950/60s, is excellent – right until to the conclusions. I especially applaud his view of what the Democrat Party contributed in American history.

From the 1870s (once they got over that slavery thing) through the 1950s the Democrats were in the forefront of important reforms. The Democrats put a human face on the transition from agricultural age to industrial age society. They led the way for government intervention, appropriately, where the marketplace failed to provide a decent, humane solution. Democrats were right about labor unions, child labor, public health, product safety, social security (in its original intent), and on facing enemies overseas until the Vietnam War.

Regrettably, the Democrats were wrong on race. True, President Franklin D. Roosevelt stood up for Blacks and started to challenge segregation. President Harry Truman personified courage to do the right moral acts. Then it became truly sad when the Democrat Party took a wrong turn at the crest of the greatest victories in the Civil Rights struggle. In the early 1970s the Democrats abandoned individual rights for group rights.

Other differences between the parties are the extension of good ideas to bad consequences. Consider the Federal government intervention which made sense for important issues, like labor unions (Yes, a Republican is pro-Union. I am named for a proud railroad worker grandfather – union activist. Pro unions that aren't liberal, socialist, corrupt, greedy and stupid). The Federal government – whether the President, the Legislature or the Judiciary - became their instrument of governance. The problem is that the U.S. Constitution enumerates powers for the Feds and leaves all others to the States. Since 1946, the Feds grabbed a lot of power. Frankly, Republicans are a big part of the problem. Now, we are a long way from living up to the Constitution.

The reforms President Roosevelt initiated during the Depression were a broad reach for a way out of desperate times. The intent was admirable. My mother told me how much she cried when President Roosevelt died. Yet, it started a snowball towards socialism. We struggle against an avalanche of socialist ideas in the Liberal view of the Nanny State.

Also, through the 1980s the Democrats had the best rhetoric –except when Ronald Reagan spoke. When I was a soldier, I watched the conventions as political theater. The Republicans sounded like accountants. The Democrats soared in speech. But, I think the Republicans have the ascendant ideas and words to carry them now.

In Real Virginia we are blessed to have Democrats as neighbors who share many

of our values. Fewer of our Democrats are the nihilist, liberal, culture warriors found north of the Rappahannock. We have great Democrats like Del. Johnny Joannou of Portsmouth. Former Gov. Douglas Wilder is one of the few men who transformed from politician to statesman. His counsel is sought by earnest Republicans who want to be wise.

This session of the Virginia General Assembly illustrates the common ground, the differences and the human imperfections of elected officials in both parties. Look at which votes are party line and which ones have significant cross over. Some of the pro-life, pro-family votes this year have a goodly number of Democrat 'Ayes'. Thanks guys and gals.

And when we stand on the high ground with the President on the impending war with Iraq, we will find many sane Democrats with us. It'll be our pride to count these fellow citizens as comrades. We will pray 'God Bless America' together.

James Atticus Bowden