

The Passy Press

Letter to the Editor

From: Charles Deahl jcharlesdeahl@undisclosed.com

To: Nick Gardiner enpg@thepassypress.com

Date: April 11, 2015

Subject: Re: New Essay Expose on Our Federal Government & What to Do About It

Dear Sir,

Mr. Haven Pell in his thoughtful essay points out that the inside workings of the U.S. government in Washington, D.C., are non-functional and dollar-addicted. We need to be told this repeatedly, because any of us who regard ourselves as clear thinkers must see this as a calamity. Robert Gates is quoted, saying that political paralysis in Washington is a serious threat to our national security. Mr. Pell tenders the suggestion that aspirants for public office should make a pledge to further the public good, as opposed to the good of K Street, that is, the previously elected officials in Washington.

How odd to call for a pledge that is now and has been for many years the essential utterance of any candidate for elected office. On the television today I watched Rand Paul announce his candidacy for President. He spoke at a lectern displaying on its front the words, "Defeat the Washington Machine." Soon after a commentator on the television channel pointed out that Ronald Reagan's stock-in-trade was running against, not with, Washington, which he continued to do *while* he was President. Barack Obama's message to achieve election was not just hope, but significantly change. The number of campaigners in the last several decades who have said that they will serve by accommodating, by working with established mechanisms, by meshing with the existing government formulas, must be extraordinarily small.

I understand the sentiment that Congress is dysfunctional. Not a day goes by that I do not cringe at the counter-productivity that is reported to me. But here is where I part with Mr. Pell's judgment. He suggests that our representatives are misbehaving, that they are not abiding by the rules they were elected to uphold. I suggest that they are behaving entirely appropriately, and democratically. They got there by votes, and the voters said, "We are unsure about what government is, but we know one thing with absolute certainty: we are unremittingly angry, and we want to hurt someone." Like the scorpion who stings the frog carrying it across the river, the voters have discontinued the goal to reach the other side, to succeed, to live well among one's fellows living well. They have, instead, responded to the compulsion to strike, to hurt, to punish. To fashion a better world will have to wait; there are more pressing matters now.

Doubtless the causes of the domination of our voting process by enraged citizens are too complex and too manifold to summarize. A part may be that as racism has effected a resurgence, the field of public concern is more open to the haters. Part may be that there are so many who do not vote, the disenfranchised, the distracted, and the host of Thoreau's quietly desperate, that a disproportionate number are left with energy fueled by anger. Part may be just the closed cycle,

the snake eating its tail. The people are unhappy because of dysfunction, the campaigners declare themselves enemies of the government, they are elected and must exhibit their antagonism to government proceedings, the unhappiness of the people increases.

We see the truly horrible episodes that play out in the world day after day, and we fear for the benefit of democracy. But it turns out to be more frightening than that. We really do have a democracy, and it really is a representative democracy, and our representatives really are speaking for us. We, we ordinary citizens, we voters, it is we who have no concept of accommodation, of acceptance, of kindness, certainly not of generosity. Those elected to office serve us, and they cannot behave better because we cannot behave better.

Charles Deahl

Charles Deahl is an American educator living in Hastings-on-Hudson, New York and a member of the Junto founded by Benjamin Franklin.