

In pursuit of a different kind of politics

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Are you tired of politics as usual? America has become increasingly polarized and political campaigns are filled with divisive and fear-mongering rhetoric that promotes apathy and cynicism about participation in public life. This is a brand of politics that strives to bring out the worst in us, manipulating us around our fears and anxieties and dividing people by race, religion, class, etc.

This is a brand of politics that causes us to lose faith in our democracy.

We have come to believe that a different kind of political engagement is possible through our work with Nevadans for the Common Good, an organization of more than 40 faith-based and secular nonprofit institutions. Instead of dividing and conquering, we must intentionally work in solidarity across lines of race, class, religion and political affiliation.

We must engage in conversations with people who are different from ourselves and build relationships that enable us to negotiate and compromise. By drawing on the wisdom of our faith and democratic traditions, we can use our voices to pursue justice and the common good.

Above all else, we must recognize that people are Nevada's greatest asset and that investing in the formation of citizens creates real, positive and lasting change in our communities.

The ancient Greeks believed that the practice of politics was an essential component of being fully human. They would gather together to deliberate, debate and negotiate about the life of their city or polis. It is from this noble idea of the polis as the body of free citizens that we derive the word politics.

The ancient Greeks did not allow women, slaves or "barbarians" to participate as citizens. In this aspect, we can certainly take pride that we have made our American democracy more fair and just.

But, in many other ways, the health of our democracy and our politics is deteriorating. Politics is dominated by money and by who can yell the loudest when it should be about citizenship and compromise.

Politics should focus on the concrete issues that affect our families and communities. The teacher shortage crisis is one such issue.

The Clark County School District began this school year with about 800 teacher vacancies. This leads to larger class sizes and a reliance on long-term substitutes as temporary solutions.

Thousands of children are denied an adequate education because of the teacher shortage crisis. We must have a high-quality, well-trained teacher in every classroom to provide our children with the education that they deserve. Short-term measures that deal with recruitment and licensing can make a big difference. But, the long-term solution is to value our educators and make teaching a more attractive profession.

The importance of educating our next generation of citizens is far too important to jeopardize through partisanship or ideology. It is an issue of common concern that the school district, Gov. Brian Sandoval, and the Legislature must address. As citizens, we must be prepared to work with our elected leaders. That begins with demonstrating that there is an organized political constituency that is paying attention to what they do or fail to do.

We are reminded by our country's founding document that "we the people" are at our strongest when we are in

relationship with each other. Jeremiah 29:7 reads, “Promote the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because your future depends on its welfare.”

The current political climate can make us feel like exiles. But, our future depends on the welfare of our city.

For our American experiment with democracy to succeed, it is vital that diverse citizens engage in public life. We need not let fear-mongering and apathy characterize our political process. Nevadans for the Common Good will continue to practice a different kind of politics, putting our faith in action to create a democracy that truly works for all Nevadans.

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Back to Nevadans for the Common Good