

What "Americans" Want

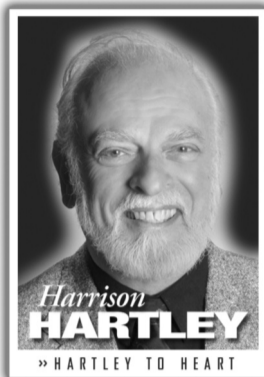
About three times a year, I teach a philosophy class at Park University called "The Meaning of Life." I didn't name it. Trying to pin down "the meaning of life" is far too ambitious a project for me (though class members tell me we usually do a pretty good job wrestling with this wild and wooly subject, and their support affords much comfort.)

Anyway, in order to lighten things up (which is a good idea in philosophy), I often print cartoons on tests and reading guide assignments, and one of my favorites has to do with the politically incorrect but perennially applicable chasm of understanding between the sexes. It features a drawing of a wise-looking old guru sitting cross-legged on a mountaintop pointing to another guru on a mountaintop some distance away. In front of the first guru is a line of men looking expectant, but the old fellow is pointing to the second guru (who has an enormous line of men in front of him), and the caption reads: "I only do the meaning of life. Old Goopta over there knows what women want."

Whatever might be said about trying to interpret what women want (or men, for that matter), virtually

every Senator and Representative in the Congress of the United States seems to have gotten himself (or herself) mixed up with old Goopta: they ALL claim to know "what Americans want."

Health Care Reform. "OH, Americans don't want that." (Republicans - ad nauseam.) Switch aisles. Health Care Reform. "Oh, Americans all want that." (Democrats - wrangling over gnats.)



Well, like it or not boys and girls, I AM AN AMERICAN, and I WANT health care reform! My good friend "X" is also an American, however, and DOES NOT want health

care reform! Now, what do you make of that? (I make of it that "X" has been brain washed at a Tea-Party rally, but he thinks I have rose-colored glasses on, so we're even.)

But here's what we can both make of politicians who claim to know "what Americans want:" they are referring to themselves and their constituents as if they were the only people who count as "American." Arrogant! Intolerable! In fact, infantile... and (heaven help us), the norm.

Well, it's part of a pattern. "You can't burn THE flag!" Okay, show

me which flag is THE flag and we won't burn that one. "THE faith of THE American people is their most precious possession." Does this mean only one faith counts and only those who have it are "real" Americans? "THE American people love sports." All of them? If you're not as committed to Monday Night Football as you are to religious worship, are you then not American?

And on a somewhat petulant but unguardedly honest personal note, every time I see John Boehner pontificating in that mush-mouthed, meandering, smarmy way of his on "what Americans want" I have to repress an overwhelming desire to throw something at the TV screen. I suppose Tea Party types have the same reaction to Barney Frank, but that only proves my point: what in the #\$%^ do you mean THE American people? There is no "THE" about it. America is a blooming, buzzing confusion of people, half of whom are buzzing confusedly about the blooming idiots that comprise the other half!

My Great Grandma used to say: "Everyone's queer but me and thee... and thee is just a bit queer." I think she was on to something. At the very least, I'd like to see our Senators and Representatives back off trying to speak for citizens they can't possibly be speaking for. And as for knowing "what American's

want," the only way to come at that is: "which Americans are you talking about?"

But that's obvious, isn't it? It's the old subjective/objective problem. Almost everybody tends to think his personal view of the universe is the end-all and be-all of knowledge and understanding, and any other view is just perverse. That my be, at least in part, what President Obama was saying when he addressed the Republican Caucus during the last week of January; it was a brilliant point, and absolutely correct.

Political parties have to stop demonizing each other, he said, because they box themselves in and can't get anything done, ever. After all, you can't go home and tell your constituents you just made a deal with somebody you've convinced them to think of as evil and an enemy of THE American way.

Exactly. And isn't it pleasant to have a President who speaks to everyone - even his political opponents - as if they were mature adults willing to listen, consider, and perhaps even compromise for the general good? Now if that were "THE" American way, it would be a great improvement. I would like to think it's "what Americans want," and if we could actually get to it, it might make "The Meaning of Life" a little easier to define.

The Work Continues in Jefferson City



One of the burdens of being on the City Council is the need to press cooperation and seek help with other governmental entities.

A two-day visit to Jefferson City gave me a chance to visit with several state legislators, as well as caused me to run late getting this issue completed.

One has to be diplomatic when visiting with state legislators, for example. We need to be conscious of their political considerations as well as the merits of the issues we try to advance.

We are fortunate in northwest Missouri to have a delegation of dedicated and friendly representatives and senators.

There is a lot of stress in Jefferson City because of a \$1.5 billion budget shortfall this year. Sen. Brad Lager (R-Savannah) said they will use \$900 from reserves, but even then a \$600 billion shortfall forces the state to make some difficult choices in cutting spending.

Sen. Lager said the state is looking at an estimated \$1.8 to \$2 billion shortfall in next year's budget as well.

He pointed to a 25-year high in unemployment numbers that is contributing to not only the reduction

in state revenues, but also the demands on the state budget for assistance.

Friction develops as legislators debate spending priorities and where to make spending cuts.

State Rep. Jim Guest (R-King City) suggested using the Constitution as a guide to cut or eliminate some programs that don't measure up. He said that he did not want to see cuts in education, which he said would hurt rural northwest Missouri school districts especially hard.

Declining enrollment in many communities as well as lower local tax collections already have many school districts making cuts to staff and programs.

Wednesday afternoon there was time in the schedule for individual visits with legislators. I visited Rep. Guest and stopped in to see State Rep. Rob Schaaf (R-St. Joseph), but he was in a committee meeting.

Another Councilmember said she and a university staffer visited with

State Rep. Martin Rucker (D-St. Joseph) and Sen. Charles Shields (R-St. Joseph).

Rep. Martin Rucker circulated among the group Wednesday evening and defended some of Gov. Jay Nixon's proposals. He too felt the budget shortfall would lead to a lot of debate over what cuts to make.

Some people seem to think that governmental work is all fun and games. Unfortunately, that is often far from being the case.

Personally, I think some good can come from all levels of government evaluating whether or not some programs are worthy of support.

Jim Guest voiced using the Constitution as a guide to help decide what programs merit taking tax money to fund. U.S. Rep. Ron Paul (R-Texas), whose column regularly appears in *The Telegraph*, has long advocated using the Constitution as a guide at the federal level.

They are right. Government should live by the rules the people made for

government!

Of course the problem is when those rules get interpreted by judges those decisions are influenced by the judges own philosophy or agenda. Because time and technology have changed reality, judges have to consider what the "intent" was of those who crafted the framework of our nation.

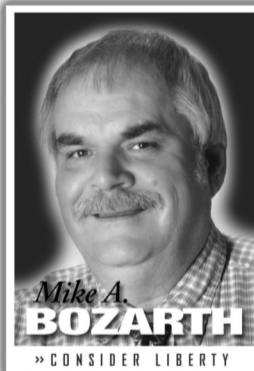
The Great Northwest sessions started early and for many lasted quite late. I drove to Jefferson City Monday night and got to bed at 1:30 a.m. and was up at 7:00 to get ready for the 8:00 breakfast.

The sessions were taxing and you can get a glimpse of me hard at work in the picture at the top left.

Kansas City Chiefs Cheerleaders were at the St. Joseph/Buchanan County Booth Wednesday evening to help boost our community.

I felt the least I could do was to stop by and welcome them to our new training Chiefs' training camp that is coming to Missouri Western State University's campus this year.

Work, work, work. As you can see, that's all I had time for. :)



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