

# ON POLITICS, AMERICA & FAITH



This I believe...

By Charlie Stuart

The answers to two questions define my feelings on political leadership. First, what is the purpose of government? Second, what form of governance is most effective? On how we answer these two questions hinge the difference between a true democracy and a democratic republic.

## *What is the purpose of government?*

The purpose of government is to make it possible to live in and leave behind a place and a people that improve the condition of, and opportunities for, its citizens. Over the centuries the American form of government, founded by forward thinking men and women of courage, intellect and faith, has continued to shift and shake defining today's present, based on our rich past, and aimed to an unknown yet bright future.

What sets our form of government apart from other nations is the dynamic tensions created by competing elements that sharpen and define the best possible outcome from the disparate segments of society—racially, politically, economically, spiritually, generationally and culturally. It is the power released by this dynamic tension that has

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propelled America to meet and solve the great problems we've faced as a nation.

When historians, leaders, and elders look back on the greatness of America they recall and reflect not on the richness of our wealth, nor the height of our buildings, nor the might of our armies—but on the compassion for our people when they are poor, hungry, sick, aged and ill-educated. And to these critical needs of a huge nation—or our local county—the government has a covenant that transcends the vagaries of election year politics, the cycles of economic activity, and the shifts in popular opinion.

No matter what government does for its citizens it has a sacred obligation to treat each citizen with dignity, integrity, fairness and compassion—and to protect those citizens who are denied these human rights.

Government successfully achieves its purpose when it enables and protects the citizens, communities, economy and culture so they can prosper and grow. Government also insures that its purpose is met when it guarantees that the covenant with the people—those who history, circumstance, disaster and disadvantage have kept from achieving all that they can—is fulfilled.

In a phrase—the purpose of government allows for the free exercise of choice, opportunity and expression of its citizens to achieve all they can

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while assuring that those in most need are protected, nurtured and enabled.

It is this purpose that the “founding fathers” wrote into existence when they drafted the Declaration of Independence then, after winning the war of independence and learning what type of government would not work—the Articles of Confederation—wrote into history the Constitution of the United States.

It is to this purpose they signed a covenant, for themselves and for the generations to come, pledging their “lives, our fortunes and sacred honor.”

It is this covenant with the future of America—the “last best hope of mankind”—that a Civil War was fought and the covenant re-signed in the blood of 600,000 Americans.

It is this covenant, carefully crafted and protected, that gave the world America’s protection paid for in lives in two world wars, two major conflicts, and dozens of other places where people desired this same purpose from their government.

Being American doesn’t make us right—it does impose great responsibility not just to the citizens of today. It imposes—it requires—that we of this generation plan for and pass on to the next generation this purpose so they can, with the same dedication of spirit, pass it on to the “generations that know us not and that we know not of.”

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We must purpose together to fulfill this covenant, signed in the blood of generations past, in these areas.

- ❖ To make sure every child receives a world-class education.
- ❖ To make sure every person sick or injured receives access to healthcare.
- ❖ To make sure every person oppressed by poverty has a chance to work out and up.
- ❖ To make sure every child that is hungry has food.
- ❖ To make sure every senior citizen is respected and offered dignity, health and living care.
- ❖ To make sure the rights and opportunities of any person, of any color, spiritual belief, age, or gender are treated the same—absolutely the same—by the government at all times.

### *What form of governance is most effective?*

Unfortunately most people in our nation believe we live in a “democracy.” A democracy—a true democracy—is when the people each, with their own vote in concert with their fellow citizens, make every decision affecting their lives. The “founding fathers” knew the fallacy of this form of government just as they also knew the danger of a monarchy or dictatorship who exercised absolute authority. That is why they

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created the United States of America as a republic—whose government elected officials stand for election and then are expected to govern as they see fit.

Why was this form of republic chosen for our governance policy? Because the Constitutional authors knew, from recent, first hand experience that the people left to their own, democratic designs would act selfishly dooming the government to chaos and anarchy. Who would want to vote in favor of a tax that builds a waterway in a state far away? What mother would vote to send her son to fight a war against a far away, foreign foe? What businessman would vote to curtail his opportunity to make money in an industry that was harmful to the environment? Those are just a few of the questions that the writers knew could not be dealt with in a democracy—hence a republic was created to give the representatives the separation from the personal, emotional issues that would naturally interfere with the best decisions for the nation.

When the original writings of the constitutional era are examined it is evident that the elected officials were expected to govern while enjoying a degree of insulation from the electorate. Members of the House of Representatives were directly elected every two years by the voters in their small districts—which gave a people's voice to the government. Senators were elected by the State's legislatures giving not only the power to the various states to influence the powerful Senate—it also enabled the voters to exercise their voice, again in small districts to elect their state

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representatives, and then have the election of Senators be one more stepped removed from direct, popular election.

Of course some of the many elements spelled out in the Constitution have been, rightfully changed over more than two centuries the United States has existed. One area that changed – and not necessarily to the good – is the direct election of Senators by the people in the states. At least their term of office – six years – was maintained giving Senators a longer time between elections to exercise their judgment, which leads to more long-term, contemplative decisions. That is why the writers of the Constitution invested in the Senate such important and powerful responsibilities – advice and consent on administration appointments and treaties.

When the original writers wrote the Constitution – and even through until the modern era of government (beginning with the Franklin Roosevelt Presidency) – the ability to know the people’s will came through two methods: the campaign itself – candidate speeches, forums, debates; and the election. Yes, during the term of office the representative was able to hear from his constituents – but not in an efficient or comprehensive way. The concept of “decision by poll” wasn’t possible and as late as the Truman election of 1948 was fatally flawed.

This representative form of government has been passed down to the local governmental entities – state, county, city and other constitutionally elected bodies. Always the common factor was the

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election of a representative who, once elected, was expected to decide the issues and policy for the entity they were elected to lead.

In recent years—from the Kennedy Presidency forward—polls have grown in effectiveness and, especially in the past two decades, have risen to a dominant factor in determining a party's platform and a candidate's position. Alarminglly these polls have become a vital element in showing elected officials the “will of the people” taking from the representative the responsibility and obligation to use their personal energy, integrity and intellect in making decisions.

What does all this mean for the type of governance we need? It is clear we are at a cross road that will lead either down the path of stagnation in vision or leadership that really leads.

What should we do? The Constitution (at the Federal, State or local levels) doesn't need changing—it needs enforcing. And this can only be done at the ballot box.

The people of the current generation of voters have grown long accustomed to promises made to “buy their vote” at the cost of elected officials who focus all of their energy on being re-elected rather than on “doing the right thing.”

The voters need to be educated, even challenged, to vote for people who are forthright in their promises—not to “bring home the goods”, but to look into the issues honestly, intellectually, fairly, and earnestly. And

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then to make the decisions that benefit all of the people they serve – not just the district from which they come.

It would be nice to dream that a nationwide education program would bring the voters into an understanding of their real and rightful role in the governance of their constitutional bodies – but it won't happen. That doesn't mean that we should abandon the teaching of "civics" that educates the next generation to their role – we should do it well, right and now!

The fastest, most effective – and yes, riskiest – way will be to let the candidates for office do the education. By aiming their messages to the wider population and concentrating on the characteristics needed to make good decisions the election process itself can be used to get this message out.

In short – we need candidates who run as "supporters of the republic form of government." Candidates who concentrate their message on the characteristics a true representative of the republic needs to govern – such as intelligence, commitment, integrity, honesty, energy, compassion and a broad-based focus on the issues and needs of the total population they will govern.

That is not too much to ask, is it? It is what we deserve, isn't it? And isn't it what the writers of the Constitution designed and promised to the generations to follow?



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Only with elected officials who understand and undertake their proper role in the governance process will America be able to move from malaise and into majesty.