

Mayor's Column
October 17, 2016

As a student of politics and a believer in its nobleness as a profession, this election season has emerged like no other. Stunning is the word that come to mind.

In a nutshell, I concur with the thoughts of others who believe that as a nation we are suffering from a drought of statesman and a flood of politicians.

In stark terms, we are learning that a politician and a statesman are not one in the same.

Webster defines a politician as “a person who gives much time to political affairs; a person experienced in politics. A statesman is defined as, “a person who is skilled in the management of public or national affairs.”

Though the definitional difference may be subtle, the difference has enormous consequences in the quality of our government.

At least since the 4th Century B.C., the distinction has been duly noted. The Athenian philosopher Demosthenes believed, “A statesman should be ahead of events and not be compelled to follow them.” By that standard, Edmund Burke, who foresaw the rise of Napoleon out of the French Revolution and Winston Churchill, who spoke against the appeasement of Hitler, certainly fit the definition of statesman.

Our Founding Fathers were also not politicians. John Adams and James Madison had almost no political experience when they were elected to serve in the Continental Congress.

Political experience no – but they had education, ideas and conviction – hallmarks of statesmanship. As John Adams said of his political stances, “always stand on principle, even if you stand alone.”

In a review of historical opinions, there is a commonality of virtues/characteristics that all agree differentiate a statesman from a politician. First and foremost, a statesman has a moral compass and doesn't govern by public opinion polls.

By contrast, a politician puts a finger in the wind and follows the most recent Gallup poll. A politician tells his constituents what he has done for them either

through speeches or mailings; a statesman is too busy trying to guarantee a future for his constituents grandchildren to toot his own horn.

Through the generations, statesman have always been perceived as ambitious yes but there is a limit as to what they will do to get to the top. They have a code of right and wrong.

Words used to describe statesman in historical works include, noble, visionary, for the common good, trustworthy, possessing integrity; lack of ego.

A statesman has foresight and devises solutions for a generation he will never see. He builds a consensus to achieve his vision, not through ads and propaganda, but with well-reasoned arguments formed from a strong education in the study of history. A political realist, his policies are devised based on their effect on the nation.

A true statesman has a bedrock of principles and believes in fundamental truths. When speaking, he appeals to the very best within his countryman.

In contrast, the primary objective for a politician appears to be re-election, and stances are influenced by their popularity with the current voting public. And often they tell us what we want to hear, not what they truly think. Woodrow Wilson, over a century ago, didn't think too much of this approach saying, "If you think too much about being re-elected, it is very difficult to be worth re-electing."

What has moved our Nation's political pendulum from the Founding Fathers to what we are experiencing today?

Many historians lay the blame on too many handlers surrounding a candidate. Everyone now employs speechwriters, pollsters, social scientists and a cadre of sycophants. Words, actions, ideas are then those of others vetted around a table for their "popularity." Authenticity is a casualty of the process. One pundit likened statesmen to vegetables – many people don't like them, but they are good for us vs politicians are like a banana split – all yummy now and I'll worry about my stomach later.

Our last two Presidents, George W. Bush and Barack Obama, assembled the two greatest campaign teams in our Country's history. Myriads of books have been

written extolling the brilliance of their campaign execution, and both political organizations serve as templates for successful politicians going forward.

Did their exemplary campaigning translate into exemplary statesman? History will be the judge.

As an electorate we have a duty to ferret out the appeasement, the unauthentic, the pandering and be an informed voter on issues that affect our lives and evaluate candidate beyond sound bites and hair-dos.

In the best of times, only 60% of those of us eligible to vote cast a ballot. The United States is at or always near the bottom of numbers of voters in democratic countries who exercise their right to vote.

Euripedes theorized that people get the government they deserve....