

“We have Met the Enemy and He is Us”--Pogo

In our current crisis, we are reaping the whirlwind of decades of bitter partisan division and insidious attacks on our governing institutions. When President Reagan declared, “Government is not the solution to our problem, government is the problem,” he struck a responsive chord, and he had a point.

The bureaucracy had become static and self-perpetuating—it needed reform. But few Americans at that time saw their government as evil or believed that our leaders intended harm to our democratic system. We had come through the upheaval of the Vietnam War and Watergate and the economic stagnation that followed, but we maintained confidence in the system itself. For all of his opposition to big government, President Reagan worked amicably with Democrats. His friendship with Tip O’Neil, for example, is well known.

Then in the years that followed, attacks mounted and the tone changed. Added to the distrust of government itself was the escalating partisan divide. If the system was broken, the other side must have broken it (Republicans if you were a Democrat; Democrats if you were a Republican). At some point, we seemed to decide that it wasn’t just bad policy but evil intent that caused the “problem,” however that “problem” was defined.

Now we have reached a point where the other party is an enemy to be vanquished entirely. When I attended the local Republican Women’s forum for candidates running for Mac Thornberry’s seat in Congress, I was deeply saddened by how many of them identified America’s most serious problem as being the Democratic Party. Facebook pages of some of our local elected officials reflect the same “us vs. them” mindset, making it difficult for anyone who doesn’t share their politics to believe the government serves them too.

I don’t believe that the majority of the public sees their fellow Americans as their enemies. Thus in my campaign, I want to revive the approach of the “good ole days.” Of course, it is fair to criticize policies—necessary in fact if our democracy is to survive—and I will do that with passion and conviction.

For example, I believe that the Texas legislature’s refusal to expand Medicaid and to support mandatory sick leave is now exasperating our public health problems. But I don’t believe my opponent, Drew Springer, supported

those policies because he wanted to make life difficult for sick people—that would be evil. Instead I believe he was motivated by concern for the economic health of the state—that’s a policy difference. He has a point to make and so do I. Let’s debate it with respect, each of us working hard to convince the voters that we are right, not that the other one is evil. That’s how a healthy democracy should work.

I would ask of my supporters that you put aside the hateful spirit that has come to dominate our political process. Become informed on policy differences and debate those—it’s harder work than insults but also more productive. Dispense with the personal attacks, the meaningless jokes and vulgarities, and especially don’t “like” or “share” ANYTHING online if you haven’t carefully checked the source and know it to be true. We need a healthy, respectful political process if we come through this crisis, and others yet to come, as a stronger and better nation.