

Viewpoints

Top of Utah needs more civilized, civic conversations

Top of Utah Voices



**Michael
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Commentary

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anyone to walk away from Hazel's house hungry.

In many ways, Hazel's house is a good model for civic dialogue.

Everyone deserves a place at the table. You don't need to indiscriminately agree with everything put forward for consideration. Critical analysis is an essential part of the conversation. But, everyone has a right to voice an opinion and to have that opinion considered. Regretfully, civic dialogue is endangered. If you listen to talk radio or TV programs

devoted to political issues, you know that many commentators don't take the time to critically assess the views of their opponents; they simply interrupt them and shout louder. It seems the way to prevail in a debate is to prevent the opposing side from speaking.

Ernest Hemingway once commented of William Faulkner, "Poor Faulkner. Does he really think big emotions come from big words?"

You could say that today's political commentators believe that big ideas come from loud words.

If you review the Internet blogs devoted to Northern Utah issues, you will find that many of the people who post entries in the blogs don't attempt to offer any critical assessment of the ideas of others. Instead, they question the right of those they disagree with to have any voice in the conversation.

Peruse the blogs and you will find comments stating that individuals don't have a right to voice an opinion because they have lived in Ogden too long. Others are dismissed because they are too old, don't have

children living in Ogden, or hold the wrong occupation.

One recent comment regarding plans for the economic development of Ogden forcefully stated that it simply takes too much time to carefully assess competing viewpoints; alternative perspectives must be dismissed without consideration.

Although I don't agree with this perspective, I do believe the sentiment points to a possible cause for the general erosion in civic dialogue. In order to critically assess the ideas of others, you must take the time to understand their viewpoint and perspective. You must take the time to listen. You must also take the time to inspect your own opinions and open yourself to the possibility that your own views might benefit from further reflection and analysis.

In our contemporary society we are increasingly unwilling to take the time for important things. It would be especially regretful if civic dialogue was destined for the same fate as the slow-cooked meal, the

long walk or the handwritten letter.

In his memoir, the Nobel Prize winner James Buchanan offered this observation on the qualities of mind he sought to emulate, "the willingness to question anything, and anybody, on any subject anytime; openness to all ideas; and finally, the basic conviction that most ideas peddled about are nonsense or worse when examined critically."

Mr. Buchanan would have been very comfortable sitting on granny Hazel's back porch and passing the time with a long, polite and sometimes critical conversation on the issues of the day.

Check the blogs for yourself:
Standard Examiner blogs
forums.standard.net/index
Weber County Democrats
weberdemocrats.blogspot.com
Weber County Republicans
wergop.blogspot.com
Weber County Forum
wcforum.blogspot.com
Lift Ogden
www.liftogden.com
The Good in Ogden
thegoodinogden.blogspot.com

My grandmother Hazel passed away at the all-too-young age of 98.

Hazel loved me dearly, and never said an unkind word to me. Her assessment of the opinions and actions of others was more balanced. I spent countless hours with Hazel on her back porch as she offered her observations on the citizens in our community.

If you eavesdropped on the conversation, you would find Hazel holding forth on many of the issues that related to our small Arkansas town.

Preachers, peddlers and politicians were all subject to Hazel's judgments. While Hazel wouldn't mince words, she was a warm and welcoming person. She loved to have company drop by and pass the time of day. Every morning before sunrise she started a pot of beans and a skillet full of corn bread. This wouldn't be the meal; she cooked that later. The beans and cornbread provided something readily on hand to offer anyone who dropped by to visit. It was hard for