

The Baxter Bulletin

A GANNETT COMPANY

Common Ground: Solutions aren't extinct

Politicians should poke their heads up from their ideological bunkers and look around.

By Cal Thomas and Bob Beckel
April 5, 2015

Cal Thomas is a conservative columnist. Bob Beckel is a liberal Democratic strategist. But as longtime friends, they can often find common ground on issues that lawmakers in Washington cannot.

Today: Consider all options

CAL: Hillary Clinton said something recently with which I agree.

BOB: Stop the presses! This is a historic moment.

CAL: She said that those who make policy in Washington should "look at what works and get out of the very unproductive discussions that we've had for too long where people are just in their ideological bunkers having arguments instead of trying to reach across those divides and come up with some solutions."

BOB: She's singing the song we have sung for years in this column. Nice that she plugged your book, *What Works*. As we both know, that sounds good, but the reality is we hear this in the run-up to most elections. Both parties are so entrenched in their ideologies and a desire to score political points and hold on to power that we never seem to agree on a problem, much less find solutions.

CAL: Many states are finding solutions to problems and balancing budgets. In your state of Maryland, newly elected Republican Gov. Larry Hogan and a heavily Democratic legislature last week agreed on a budget. The *Washington Post* noted, "it was the first time in a decade that the budget passed the Senate without any no votes or abstentions." Each side gave a little and gained a lot. That should be a model for Congress. Only the federal government continues year after year in its dysfunction. I Googled "ways to cut federal spending" and found many credible proposals.

BOB: Such as?

CAL: The libertarian Cato Institute has published, "A Plan to Cut Federal Spending." It contains some things we've previously discussed in this column. The first one you won't like, which is repealing Obamacare and replacing it with one of several market-driven plans that would save money, expand choices and return doctors to the center of caregiving, not government.

BOB: You're right. I do oppose repealing Obamacare, because it's working for growing numbers of previously uninsured Americans.

CAL: We'll save that debate for another time. Additional reductions proposed by Cato include block-granting Medicaid, raising Medicare premiums and deductibles, cutting non-Medicaid state/local grants by 20%, saving an estimated \$346 billion, in total. That may not be much when we are burdened with an \$18 trillion debt (and growing), but it's a down payment.

BOB: What about the other head of the entitlement monster, Social Security?

CAL: Cato recommends price indexing Social Security benefits, raising the retirement age, cutting Social Security disability insurance by 20% and cutting Supplemental Security Income by 20%, saving an additional \$117 billion. There's plenty more which can be to read at Downsizing the Federal Government (downsizinggovernment.org). There are other proposals, equally good, from other think tanks and even some politicians.

BOB: You know, I have long believed there is a lot of waste in the defense budget. Congress votes for things the military doesn't want, and planes and other weaponry that cost a lot but don't work.

CAL: I agree, and many of our allies need to do more in their own defense, as apparently is now happening in the Middle East with Saudi Arabia and others putting planes in the air and boots on the ground to battle the Islamic State.

BOB: Do I detect some veiled praise from you for President Obama's Middle East strategy of staying out of that bottomless pit?

CAL: Hey, even a stopped clock is right twice a day, though chaos is not a policy. Finding common ground at home begins with a change in the public's thinking about the role of government, which the Founding Fathers wanted to be limited, so the people might be unlimited in their pursuit of happiness. As we approach another April 15 deadline for paying our taxes, we see huge amounts of our money wasted by government, which has gorged itself on its unearned income and been a poor steward of it. Too many people are relying on government instead of relying on themselves.

BOB: I would like to hear from Hillary Clinton what she would do to get both sides out of their ideological bunkers. What would people in her "bunker" be willing to compromise on with those

in the Republican and conservative "bunker"? How would she declare a cease-fire and meet in the middle? Both sides have been prisoners of their ideological wings for so long, I fear she would be heavily criticized by the left if she reached out to the right, as the right has been critical of Jeb Bush for some of his moderate views. If she's serious, her comments raise my hopes that 2016 might be different from recent election cycles.

CAL: As newly declared Republican presidential candidate Sen. Ted Cruz might put it: Imagine!