

### Charlie Edgren: The pursuit of power impedes most politicians

By Charlie Edgren / El Paso Times

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Life could get a heckuva lot easier for Congressman Silvestre Reyes if he would just call a town hall meeting and face the public. Not one of those faux town hall meetings, where he doesn't have to look at anyone except whoever happens to be sitting in the room with him.

It should be noted that Reyes isn't alone in cutting and running from real town hall meetings. One TV report estimated that more than two-thirds of our federal lawmakers -- senators and reps, Democrats and Republicans -- have ducked face-to-face town hall meetings on health care.

I recall reading "The Imperial Presidency," a book we used in a political science class. It's interesting more than 30 years later to see how chillingly accurate it remains. In a 2000 Cato Institute policy analysis, Gene Healy starts by saying, "In his classic 1973 book The Imperial Presidency, historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr. warned that the American political system was threatened by 'a conception of presidential power so spacious and peremptory as to imply a radical transformation of the traditional polity.'"

While the specificity about the presidency remains true, and arguably has grown in strength over the years, the "imperial" concept could easily be extended to the Senate, House and

appointed officials.

With exceptions here and there -- and none that I could name offhand -- our elected officials fall prey to this "imperial" attitude that digs a huge chasm between them and their constituents.

The mantle of power rides comfortably on elected shoulders and there are few in Washington who choose to shrug off that mantle and truly represent their constituents. It's little wonder that people attending these town-hall meetings get upset and start yelling; their representatives and senators won't listen to them otherwise.

Don't believe it? Try calling or writing your senators and congressmen -- any senators and congressmen -- and see how promptly you get a reply. Generally you're shuffled from person to person and office to office, no doubt on the theory that you'll get tired and give up. That's what your elected officials hope.

The same goes for letters. Write to your congressman or senator and you'll get a friendly, warm and intimate form letter -- if you get a reply at all.

A notable exception to this is U.S. Rep. Ciro Rodriguez, whose 23rd Congressional District includes part of El Paso. A friend of mine contacted him about a certain matter and actually got a prompt, personal, written reply. This, however, is the exception.

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There is very little that's representative about those who represent us in Washington. Their concern is for the accumulation of power, votes and money. They have no wish to govern and every wish to rule. They have little desire to represent, and a lot of desire to dictate.

Back to town-hall meetings. Our elected and appointed officials have distanced themselves so much from their constituents, those voters who put them into office, that they are afraid -- yes, afraid -- to have face-to-face meetings with "their" people.

That is at once pathetic and reprehensible. Those of the ruling caste who refuse to meet face-to-face with their constituents don't deserve the support of those voter/constituents. The imperial pursuit and acquisition of power leaves no time to bother with mere constituents.

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