

SNG-Middle must rise-10-23-17

The middle must be heard

By Jim Nowlan

I worry a great deal about the polarization of what's left of our two major parties. The Democrats are in thrall to African-American leadership plus party identity culture wars; all they seem to want from government is more.

Within the GOP a battle for dominance is underway among Establishment conservatives, the Tea Party, and the Trump program, spelled out to us in 144 characters every morning.

Nobody speaks for me anymore.

I think most Americans are somewhere in the middle, between the 30-yard lines of the field. We are not necessarily centrists, yet pragmatists who want to see big problems solved and provide order, harmony and prosperity.

I don't know what a person in the middle thinks; I can only speak for myself. Yet here are a few positions of mine that seem not to be well represented today. Apologies for the brevity imposed by the tyranny of a 700-word max.

- Guns. I'm in support of the 2nd Amendment but oppose assault weapons, which used to be banned. I am certainly not for letting lawless teen children in Chicago have access to guns, which are fenced to them from out of state.
- Abortion. I am opposed to abortion, as are most people, yet I am reluctantly pro-Choice, as I think letting Big Brother invade a woman's body is egregious in a supposedly free society.

My friend Perry Klopfenstein, of Gridley, is staunchly pro-Life. He proposes a pro-Reduction program in which both sides would, ideally, work together to reduce the incidence of abortions, which are going to occur regardless of any law.

- International politics. I believe the U.S. must continue to play its role as the world leader, but that Congress should require the President to submit plans to lawmakers, in secret if necessary, for ending our involvement in each conflict. There are no plans or clear goals I know of for exiting Afghanistan and the Middle East.
- Immigration. We should let “Dreamers” stay. We should reduce illegal entry to the US, but a “Wall” is not needed to do so.
- Illinois state and local pensions. We must reduce the burden of these pensions, which are too rich (disclosure: I receive \$29,000 a year from the university system, for a surprisingly few years of university work).

Many municipal police and fire pension systems are much worse off than those of the state. We should pass a law to allow perilously burdened cities to declare bankruptcy, so they can rewrite their pension programs, reduce benefits, and thus make them sustainable. As for state pensions, Illinois lawmakers must pass yet another major pension reform bill, for example, to eliminate the incredibly costly annual 3 percent compounded increase.

I know the state high court has said in the past that pensions are guaranteed, but by now four of seven justices might see a future collapse of the state treasury as indeed possible, absent reform.

- Taxes. We should tax retirement income in Illinois, exempting Social Security, which would generate \$2 billion in revenue. Right now, nearly half the claims for exemptions

go to retirees under 65. We could use the \$2 billion to reduce other taxes and get out from under the cloud of being one of the highest tax states in the nation.

Finally, I propose that we create a new The Middle Rising Party (or better name) in Illinois. We would need to file a slate of statewide candidates, from governor on down. At 76, I am too old to take a top slot on this slate but would be willing to put my name forward, if needed, for a lesser state office.

We wouldn't win, not with hundreds of millions of dollars from billionaires sloshing around in Illinois politics. Yet we could generate enough attention that voters would know there is another option out there.

If we received 5 percent of the vote, we would become a certified political party into the future.

And remember, it took the new Republican Party four election cycles, 1854 to 1860, to win big.

This effort, in which I would put my shoulder to the wheel, would keep me out of saloons for the coming year.

But I am serious. What do you think? Is this idea a hit or a miss, and why? Email:

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