

report PUBLIC JUSTICE

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Editor's Watch

Conversations on America's Future

The next presidential election, still a year away, has been coming at us for too long already. The talk and posturing of would-be candidates for that election have been in our face, it seems, ever since the last election.

If you pay close attention, however, you'll notice that some very important issues are being raised, issues like health-care insurance, American foreign policy, the environment and more. Nevertheless, talking about issues, even important issues, in stump speeches and in so-called debates is not the same as actually rallying public officials, members of ones own party, and fellow citizens to a course of action that can lead to enduring and just policies.

System Crisis

Unfortunately, our political system increasingly separates the business of running for office from the process of governing. Candidates on the campaign trail do not have to show that they are capable of governing or how they will build a team and work with Congress to govern. They simply have to touch enough buttons to draw positive attention to themselves and negative attention toward others to try to get more votes at election time. Only after they enter office do they begin to deal with the responsibility of governing.

However, governing is a very difficult responsibility in our system because the president has less and less control over Congress and Congress itself is less and less able to broker competing interests even among members of the majority party that's in control. Consequently, the president and members of Congress often spend more time berating one another than they do legislating and governing. And they spend an immense amount of time politicking and raising money in preparation for the next election. Politics takes precedence over governing.

Not only is our political system broken, as many scholars and commentators keep pointing out, but an increasing number of the most important matters facing government are now international in scope. Think of the environment, wars and rumors of wars, the value of the dollar, trade deficits, migration of peoples, the outsourcing of jobs, and much more. Our political leaders must increasingly be able to think and act with a global perspective and in cooperation with other governments.

During the next 12 months you and I may feel overwhelmed by campaign rhetoric and frustrated by the fact that little is being accomplished by those who now hold office in Washington. And during the same 12 months a great deal of what is important to the long-term well-being of the United States and the world may not come into focus at all.

Taking Our Citizenship Seriously

For these reasons and more, during the next 12 months, the Center for Public Justice is sponsoring “Conversations on America’s Future” in homes and halls around the country to allow you and me to talk about the issues and crises of greatest concern to us. I am not running for office. You don’t have to vote for me. We can discuss the issues without inhibition and posturing. The Center is highly concerned with the kind of long-term changes that are needed in public policies and the electoral process so that good government can take precedence over the tired rhetoric and interest-group politicking of those who hold, and want to hold, public office.

We are excited about what can take place in serious discussion about America’s future. I hope you will join me at one of the scheduled Conversations (which will continue to be announced) and will even consider hosting one yourself.

Throughout 2007 we have been giving thanks for the *Center’s 30 years of service* even as we now look ahead to the 31st year and many more beyond that, as God guides and blesses. We look forward to engaging with you in looking ahead this election year.

—James W. Skillen©