

SUDBURY TOWN CRIER

On American citizenship, politics and politicians

Staff Writer Wicked Local

Published 11:24 a.m. ET March 3, 2017 | Updated 11:24 a.m. ET March 3, 2017

As this unprecedented national election comes to an end, I feel compelled to write about what makes one an American and why politics matter. After being in the U.S. for one sixth of the life of the Republic, I believed the truths about American citizenship and the importance of politics were self-evident. I will share my thoughts about these topics and why we need to reclaim politics for its intended higher purpose. I will also write about the citizen voter, the most important person in a democracy.

I admire the Rule of Law that is innate to most Americans. I respect that the spirit and ideals of the Constitution have been preserved unbroken from generation to generation — a Constitution that guarantees citizenship to all, with no pecking order and no matter where one hails from, one that allows for an orderly transfer of power. I cherish the spark of creativity, kept aglow by a unique blend of individual expression and societal obligation, without the pressure to conform. Even as these reasons led me to become an American, I realize the many pressing new and ongoing problems that need to be addressed. But hope of continual progress is evident from a reading of American history.

On a personal note, I thank the taxpayers of the U.S. and India, and my many teachers in both places for my education.

I wanted to serve the country that has given much to me and my family. There are many ways to serve. I chose politics. As a local politician, here are my thoughts on politics. Politics, at its core, is about assigning public money to public good based on public priorities. The following three combinations are not politics. Private money in pursuit of private good is free enterprise, the engine of economic vitality. Private money allocated for public good is charity, one that is laudably prevalent in US, but public good cannot rely on charity. Public money diverted to private use is corruption, for which many public officials

are successfully prosecuted.

The political questions then are: What is the scope of public good? What belongs and does not belong there? How do we gather public money? What is the proportion of taxes, fees and hoped-for growth? How do we prioritize the public needs? It is politics that enable free societies to debate these questions. There are not just two answers to these questions, one correct and the other incorrect.

A capable politician, who respects the office that he or she is seeking, and who respects the voter, prepares well to answer these questions. Not only should a politician have broad themes to the answers, but ought to explain in detail how those ideas will be realized. Now, politics and politicians are endlessly mocked, sometimes for good reason. Just as we don't devalue physicians because some may be quacks, we ought to give competent politicians a hearing and reject others. We should expect preparation.

Let us remember that it was collaborating politicians who gave us the Constitution, a politician who carefully crafted the Emancipation Proclamation, a politician who steadied the nation at the time of the Great Depression and led us to victory in WW II. So, let us, individually and collectively, do what we can to take politics seriously, and politicians a bit less so, and do away with distractions.

Finally, let us consider the voter, the essential bedrock of a democracy. Because we have a representative democracy, and not all future problems are known, voters also pay attention to the judgement and temperament of candidates. In a democracy, there are no winners or losers amongst candidates. One prevails and others do not. All well-prepared candidates deserve our respect, as they not only inform each other but inform voters as well. It is the voters and democracy itself that are the true winners.

Now there is intense interest in national elections because fundamental questions about the nation are on the ballot. I request all fellow voters is to stay engaged even for your town and state elections, where questions about education and quality of life are considered. So, certainly vote every fourth November, but also vote at every opportunity in local elections.

We as voters grant temporary custody of the office. We can reaffirm or revoke our permission at the next election.

—*Radha Raman Gargeya, Powder Mill Road*