



## Shut Up and Be Civil

By:

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Conservatism must be on the rise because once again we find ourselves being treated to a round of scolding concerning the lack of civility in our public discourse, as if we've fallen to unplumbed depths and must button up lest the moderate masses take offense. With all due respect, that's a bunch of hooley.

It's no coincidence that both *ad hominem* attacks and appeals to civility so often come from the side that's run out of arguments. And nobody should be surprised that it's getting nasty out there with so much now at stake. The current tenor of our conversation was predictable and can be easily explained. It was predictable because, as a famous economist once said, if something can't go on forever it probably won't. And it's explainable by the dual effects of unsustainable spending levels and revulsion at government's increasing and political inclination to pick winners and losers.

The simple fact of the matter is that we're running out of stuff to give away, and both the givers and the takers are starting to squeal. Past politicians and their collegial colleagues were fortunate to serve during a period when government at all levels could shift from being a protector of rights to a provider of goods by passing the bill along. They in effect could say "Vote for me and I'll give you this and make that guy pay for it." "That guy" is getting tired of it.

Federal spending increased 299% above inflation between 1970 and 2009. Household income, meanwhile, went up a paltry 27%. That means that government largesse grew at over ten times the rate of household incomes. Of course people got along. Our elected representatives weren't making hard choices about preserving America's unique strengths in a more complicated world; they were merely borrowing from our kids and making deals on how to divide the spoils. It's easy to get along when you're spending someone else's money and the pot is ever expanding. It's only when the bottom of the pot becomes visible that the feeding frenzy begins.

The other reason people aren't getting along is that government has reached an unprecedented level of picking winners and losers, often for overtly political ends. If you're worried about negative campaign ads or corporate lobbying, before bemoaning the symptom you should consider that every dollar spent comes from somebody or some interest who either wants to be on a winners' list or off a losers' list. Eliminate government's ability to pick winners and losers and you eliminate the incentive for gaming the campaign finance system and hiring K Street lobbyists. Anything else is just picking at the scab.

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I for one also find it offensive that mega corporations like General Electric can apparently create a business plan based on green energy incentives and then pay zero taxes on billions in income while I pay higher energy costs and watch good jobs go overseas. I'm offended that unions and advocacy groups like AARP can apply for and receive waivers from the more stringent sections of a health care bill that they spent tens if not hundreds of millions of dollars pushing onto the rest of us. That angers me, and if expressing that anger is more offensive to you than them using the government to pick my pocket then we clearly have different definitions of freedom.

So yes, the temperature and volume are rising. The people paying the bills are getting angry and the people reaping the benefits are getting scared. But for anyone who pines for the mostly mythical days of holding hands and group hugs across the aisle, I suggest you put the tools and responsibility for success and failure back into the peoples' hands. If no one else is to blame, there's no reason to point fingers.

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