

Community Comment
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A Social Contract

We take driving for granted in this country. Most of us get our license at 16 or 17 and go about the business of learning the ropes. Experience is the best teacher as well as maturity. Driving isn't all that hard, after all. Learning the basic rules to be followed and making good judgments are the heart of the art and skill of good driving. When you think about the trust we put in each other, it's amazing that we have as few accidents as we do. That's not to say that we don't kill and injure each other at a high number each year but we do pretty good considering the millions of trips that are made daily. We often drive down a two lane road at 55 miles per hour with only a broken line in the middle to separate us from oncoming traffic. I've traveled 299 to Chico on business five times in the last month and watch the cars go by me without hardly a worry. We have a social contract and it works far more often than not. This contract is unwritten but says that I agree to stay on my side of the road and I expect you will do the same.

I think these unwritten social contracts work in many aspects of our daily lives. The more rural the area the fewer of these contracts and the more densely populated the area the more contracts we make with each other. We don't learn these in school and there is no book you can buy. We learn these from watching the people closest to us go through their daily lives. Good models bring about good new members of society and bad models create problems.

I was quite disappointed to watch a few members of Congress forget or chose to ignore their social contract with the American public. The first clue to this bazaar behavior was when they ran for elected office. Many of them seem to and many actually said the hate government. This is our government. Elected officials are representing the area they serve; not just those that voted for them. Politics by it's nature is not black and white. It is often defined as the art of compromise. To stand for certain principles is one thing; to obstruct and shut down government is an act of terrorism and or treason.

This representative democracy of ours has for two hundred plus years required a social contract. We know we have different opinions about certain issues. That requires an elected official to argue his or her point of view, try to persuade others to join that point of view and then vote on the issue. In the end, a majority will express their will and we all will abide by that decision. There are standard and built in methods for changing laws on the books. The method used these first weeks of October violated the social contract we all expect. How do I know? Look at how much it cost us all; every single one of us. Estimates that I have seen range from twenty five to thirty two billion dollars. That is that auto accident caused by someone who chose to cross the line in the middle of the road just to prove a point.

I agree with most of the polls out; the Tea Party segment of the Republican Party is to be held responsible for this. I have said many times that we need two strong and viable parties to make this government work for all of us. This kind of reckless behavior will only make the rancor in Washington worse. Hating our government is not a strategy for governing.

This has been Sam Pennisi for community comment.