

Community Comment
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Sam Pennisi

Character counts in elections

Over the years I've given a lot of thought regarding character. My parents were good teachers and role models. I had good public school teachers along the way. My University experience was rich in the nuance of defining character; specifically what I thought was good character.

When I became a teacher, then a city councilman, then a parent, character became personal. I became conscious of the development of my character and how that impacted others. When my daughters began seriously dating potential partners, we had many casual discussions of the attributes of the young men they met. Once we even talked about red flags that might be a warning sign of sorts. Nothing specific was discussed but characteristics were described.

I recently had an opportunity to think about this again so I put together a list of attributes that begin to define character in a neutral way. The subject is subjective and so each one of us will define and rate the importance of each attribute from our own perspective and values. To make judgments then becomes quite personal.

I think this assessment is important in selecting our elected officials and since we have elections coming up, I'd thought I would share these thoughts. Our elected officers are not only not perfect, they would never vote always the way any one of us would want. No policy plank in a party could ever be universally perfect. So what we have left is character to put our trust in when we vote.

I'm sure there are more but here are some key attributes to consider in judging character:

Honesty, Integrity, Trust

This is more important than most people think. Knowing they are honest leads to trust. Little white lies can erode that trust but big lies destroy it. If you have trust, it means they have your back.

Gratefulness

This attribute is often seen as joy in what a person takes in their work. We can tell the difference between some one who enjoys serving others and some one who feels they have to serve.

Respectful

Respect for whom they serve, our history, wants and needs and even our failings must be respected.

Confidence and humility

This is someone who knows their strengths and weaknesses, how to make difficult decisions, and when to admit a mistake. An apology and an effort to fix something is all we can ask.

A willingness to learn

The ability to learn and grow our outlook is key to good decisionmaking. It is also key to longterm maintenance, change, and planning.

There is more to this list. But if we elected people of good character, our democracy would be in good hands.

This has been Sam Pennisi for community comment