

WHAT WOULD LINCOLN DO?

Don't do something, just stand there!

Unlike its call to action cousin, "Don't just stand there, do something!" the emphasis here is to take pause. Sometimes, when a decision threatens to flood us with a sea of change yet we must navigate a course, it may be wise to first hold fast to the pier of practicality. Namely, get smart on where the rocks are, where the currents are unyielding and where the waters are too shallow to sustain any voyage.

We are all now waist deep in a less than pristine pool of candidates' promises. Polled and pulled again and again by rip tides of rhetoric, rants and ravings, citizens' are struggling to get to the safe shores of sound reasoning. It is not easy to know what to do with our most precious gifts; our voices and our votes. During this quadrennial election time, the most powerful nation in history in this perpetually imperfect world is once again pregnant with posturing, promises and proselytites. Granted, our government and way of life would grind to a mind numbing standstill if all we "just stood there", but it still can flourish if we first consider what we cannot do and if we avoid what will not work.

Every morning, on my way to vespers with the great God of caffeine and paying homage to my owners (two Siamese cats), I pass a beautiful 1865 Alexander Gardner reproduction of the best friend I never had, Honest Abe. That wonderfully human leader's genius was enriched by his imperfection and his uncanny knowledge of human nature. He held that our "Grand Experiment" constitutional federal republic cannot tolerate policies and laws that violate what some have called Lincoln's "Great Cannot-Ments". In brief, political solutions that were contrary to human nature would not survive.

Today, Mr. Lincoln would suggest that we separate the sizzle from the steak. He would further demand that all candidates enunciate clear positions on the issues which should be measured against these timeless "Great Cannot-Ments". Neither original nor simply platitudes, history has shown that leaders that legislate in ignorance of these "Great Cannot-Ments" have and will always eventually fail.

Mr. Lincoln observed that prosperity is not born of thrift and one must invest to prosper, not just save. He further cautioned that governments cannot spend more than they earn. Consider this as you hear massive spending plans or cuts proposed by any candidate.

Our sixteenth president had core notions about equality as regards fundamental rights, yet he also held to the fundamental reality that affluence and actualizing opportunity would never be equivalent among all. So as we look at social engineering policies and legislation that address levels of government involvement in the "pursuit of happiness", remember Mr. Lincoln's caution that you "cannot further the brotherhood of man... by inciting class hatred". This great president also continued that you cannot ... "strengthen the weak by weakening the strong... or lift the wage earner by pulling down the wage payer". In short, he summarized... "You cannot help the poor man by destroying the rich"

Our national security is certainly at the forefront of everyone's concerns and Mr. Lincoln had a rather prescient attitude about that as well. In a nutshell, he opined that you cannot ... "establish security on borrowed money."

So, as we listen to hopefully less of the grating sounds of shifting sands and pandering rhetoric and listen more to the resonance of resolute rocks of solidified positions, reflect on Mr. Lincoln's core premise that leaders and legislation contrary to the nature of both man and our republic cannot long endure.

Of course, Abraham said it best... "You cannot build character and courage by taking away man's initiative and independence" ... (And)... you cannot help men permanently by doing for them what they could and should do for themselves"

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