

Better than a Thousand Hollow Words

By Maurice Carter in The Covington News – August 26, 2012

Is it me, or has the 2012 Presidential campaign been going since 1912? No doubt, Republicans began plotting to unseat Barack Obama on the morning of November 5, 2008. That's politics. But, it's 71 long days yet to next national referendum on leadership, and we're just now reaching the nominating conventions. As if the rhetoric wasn't heated enough already.

Now, we'll enjoy two weeks of fiery oratory to the faithful, then on to the debates!

Sigh...

I'm not the only one weary with the waging of this particularly uncivil war. We pride ourselves on the peaceful transfer of power that is the hallmark of American democracy. And, perhaps that's true between November and January every four years. But, the real bloodshed and carnage take place in the months – now years – leading up to those Novembers. In the War of 2012, no one has suffered deeper casualties than Truth.

Those who lament the size of the federal regulatory bureaucracy should be more alarmed at the swelling ranks of "fact checkers" needed to monitor this campaign. We've evolved from testing candidate claims to analyzing and refuting every media outlet, blogger, and talking head. We even have fact checkers to fact check the fact checkers, and with good reason. In the age of "doubling down," campaigns don't just twist half truths into little lies, they tell whoppers and repeat them ad nauseum. Meanwhile, thanks to the Citizens United ruling and innovations like the Super PAC, candidates stay clean above the muddy fray.

I've tapped my heels three times; I've even cried out for help from Mr. Wizard. Nothing seems to work. We're stuck for 71 more days. And then, the next campaign starts.

This week, I read a quote from Buddha that hits too close to home this political season:

"Better than a thousand hollow words is one word that brings peace."

It's easy to relate to the part about hollow words. We're inundated with them – in print, on TV, and across the internet. But, what single word might a would-be leader utter to bring peace in troubled times?

What comes to me is "unity."

It's a foreign concept during a "battle for the soul of our nation" or a "war to take back our country" to speak of unity. Politics is winner take all. We'll sing "Kumbaya" in January, once the winners have punished the losers for daring to think differently.

We're told Barack Obama and Mitt Romney couldn't possibly be more different. We're led to believe no two world views are more divergent than those of the Obama/Biden and Romney/Ryan campaigns. Devotees in each camp are convinced November victory by the opponents will end America as we know it (or imagine it to be). That's how you convince soldiers your war is worth their sacrifice.

For certain, there are glaring platform differences on taxes, Medicare, Social Security, abortion, same sex marriage, etc. I personally believe the economic plans advocated by Ryan and embraced by Romney would be a disaster for most Americans. But, I also see no signs President Obama is able to inspire a bipartisan solution.

Another sigh seeps out, but there remains within me a battered yet resilient hope for unity. Amid many differences, I'm struck by similarities and the possibility more common ground exists than we've been led to believe. Is it only irony or something more that Republicans hell bent on repealing "Obamacare" will this week nominate a candidate who architected a very similar healthcare law as Governor of Massachusetts?

Paul Ryan preaches the party line against federal stimulus and bailouts, while simultaneously seeking stimulus dollars from the Obama administration for his congressional district. He leaves behind a voting record supporting the Bush stimulus in 2002, Medicare expansion, the \$700B TARP program to rescue Wall Street, and the automobile industry bailout.

Actions reveal the messy reality rhetoric so blissfully ignores. Some call these contradictions hypocrisy, but I see something more positive. Call it common ground. It may be ground the two sides are loath to share, but it suggests differences are more nuanced and less rigid than the respective bases want to believe.

It's a long shot, but I still dream of a moment the combatants shake hands, face eye-to-eye, and invoke that word "unity". I imagine a time they put shared beliefs alongside differences and examine both with equal zeal. I long for the day getting it right becomes more important than being right.

Maybe the candidates can't do it, but then it's up to you and me.