

A Political Opinion

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By Kirstie Bingham

In the last few weeks I've had more than a few posts on Facebook by a couple of rabid Tea Party friends. Friends who I've met through various walks of life in places outside my homogenous political zone, people who fundamentally I like and have general life interests in common, but who differ wildly from my West Coast political standpoint. For each post I've put up perplexed by the ridiculousness of the government shutdown, commenting on what I saw as the narrow minded, vindictive childishness of the Tea Party wing, they've countered with claims of cronyism and comparisons of Obama to Hitler. The latter which I found incredibly offensive and irrational.

And, in response, many friends have emailed me. "Who are these crazy people posting on your wall?" Emails received from friends of liberal leaning, to be sure, but more in that case because they are compassionate, educated, logical, forward thinking, intellectual friends who look at the lack of rationality and mass hysteria that sweeps the general population of the Tea Party movement and shake their heads in wonder. They are dumfounded at the words being written by the radical right during these digital arguments, terrified by the dogmatic stubbornness based in little fact and great reliance on a limited scope of propaganda.

Those said Tea Partiers like to come back at me claiming "liberal bias" when I quote them statistics, post long sections copied from Wikipedia defining the use of the executive orders, lists of how those said executive orders were used by Bush (but now hated by Obama), definitions of the separation of budgetary powers, lists of actions Obama has put forward just in the last year to support veterans when they accuse him of hating veterans. And more. When the arguments get tough they resort to snide birther commentary, questions of why didn't he release his college records and other talking points that dismiss and distract but don't argue against anything. For the vitriol and commentary they post, I post stats and figures and facts and quotes. My high school debate teacher would be proud.

And they counter with, "You're a good sheep," "Your king would be proud," and, "Find an unbiased news source for your information," the latter when quoting The New York Times or The Washington Post.

The reality is rationality, common sense, logic and an understanding of basic high school civics are none of them parts of the Tea Party arguments. The separation of powers, each branch's responsibilities, seem to be out of the realm of understanding for this group of middle aged white men who don't understand that Limbaugh and Beck are not journalists, but the vitriolic equivalent of a far right, pot stirring op-ed. They lambasted me for posting a quote from an op-ed in The New York Times, but every putrid spout of language from the god-like Limbaugh's mouth must be taken as a gospel third only to Jesus and Reagan. Despite the fact that Reagan would be horrified and wouldn't understand a thing that they're saying. Particularly since Reagan believed that national debt was a good thing.

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They have Sarah Palin and Michelle Bachmann. We have Elizabeth Warren and Wendy Davis. The contrasts between the pivotal ladies of each party are an extraordinarily huge chasm. But in these comparisons are also lost the Kelly Ayottes and Jaime Herrera Beutlers, Republican women of sense, intelligence and logic, whose willingness to work within the political structure and actually try to get things done with bipartisan discourse earns them the Tea Party negative term "RINO."

Seems to me when you start labeling people within your party with terms you consider derogatory just because they are willing to cross the aisle and compromise for the better of the people, you've lost the point. Like a child not liking its parents' rules but not wanting to pay for rent on its own house, the Tea Party movement demonizes those within the Republican mainstream, but won't leave the safety of their shelter because it knows without them its numbers will be sorely diminished and it will lose all political clout. The Republican party would be smart to kick this unruly teenager to the curb.

This is not even to get to the discussion of "negotiation". The fool's errand that everyone else in the world saw as, in whichever term you choose, hostage taking, extortion or blackmail, trying to force through a complete political strategy that had at its twisted depths not only a repudiation of the popularly-voted and Supreme Court-supported Affordable Care Act but a wide range of unpopular Republican ideologies from oil pipelines and drilling in natural resources to controlling women's reproductive rights. They stand back and say, "But you won't negotiate," as they put a gun to the country and say, "Either we play with the toys I want or else." As my tighty Righty friends on Facebook parrot the voices of their talking heads saying, "But we played fair; now they won't negotiate," they don't see the irony, and refuse to see the danger that their actions could cause. Because parties switch power and whatever you set as a precedent now can be used by your opponent later when it's their turn with the gavel. Late night alteration of long standing Congressional voting rules and grandstanding hostage taking, when you use them, become tools that the other party gets to use at some future date.

The short term progress of the country returning to normal today is a victory not just for the country but for the moderate, sane members of the Republican party, as they take back the wheel of their out of control bus and say, "You've proven you're not a good driver." Too many Republican party members of intelligence and common sense have been sidelined these last few years to a dangerous, radical minority in the party. The Tea Party is like a toddler, standing in a poopy diaper, screaming at the edge of the playpen, about to topple it over because Mommy told them, "No."

It was time for a little spanking.

But I will say that while I wasted time on Facebook arguing with their illogical logic, as they claimed stats and ideas propagated by the Tea Party-approved media, everything Fox to the right (and yes, apparently there is "news" to the right of Fox), and dismissed anything that occurs out of that realm, these arguments have been incredibly valuable in the sense of it's opened up my mind. Not to the truth of their perspective. Because, sadly, I believe there is little to that. But to the fallacies of their arguments and the talking points that they spout on a regular basis. It's forced me to be able to take what I believe,

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what I know, what I understand to be compassionate and logical and healthy for the country and be able to put it in words. To define policies, to define laws, to be able to parse wildly tangled activities of the government into succinct arguments. To admit, at times, when my logic was wrong, but more to be able to counter their arguments when I firmly believed I was correct. That forcible education has found me a much more knowledgeable citizen, which can only be good for both myself, and for the country I live in. It's tiring and it's irritating and I often feel like I'm smashing my head against a digital wall, but I'm better for it.

The bigger question though is was the country better for this crisis? Given the unnecessary waste of money and hardships placed on both the most vulnerable of our population and the devoted government employees as income streams were shut down, it's hard to answer yes to that. But I think because of it many of us have a much firmer, much clearer grasp on how exactly we want our government to behave. And what behaviors are absolutely unacceptable. We will probably forget, over time. The dullness of days mutes our memories and so the sharp criticisms of the last few weeks will slowly fade into the ethos. But there's a mark on the appointment calendar of the United States with a big black pen that says, "almost." That indelible ink of history will be much slower to fade.