

# Our wakes up calls are not working

Every once in awhile, along with all of the other stuff we receive via e-mail, something really hits home. Think about the quote below for a moment and if anyone can find a tiny shred of common sense; be my guest and let me know.

"Paradoxical Quote of the Day from Ben Stein: 'Fathom the hypocrisy of a government that requires every citizen to prove they are insured ... but not everyone must prove they are a citizen.'"

C'mon folks, we are going to force mandatory health insurance coverage on every citizen and yet we have court battles going on over the right to determine citizenship. Have we completely lost it?

I want to share a story with you that I think might help explain even more why our corrupt system is just not working. Let me state up front that this is not a knock on higher education or any particular profession.

I was in Detroit once with the chairman of our company reviewing our original equipment business. At that time, the original equipment segment of our business was one of my responsibilities. Dr. Von Gruenberg was relatively new as the top leader of Continental and very concerned and anxious to get both Continental and General Tire back on track. This guy probably did more to save both Continental and General Tire than anyone I know during the bad periods of not-so-stellar performance.

I need to pause and make sure that I keep things straight. Even though there were years of struggle for the company, the Mt. Vernon operation was always very successful and a real lynchpin for North America and Continental. Mt. Vernon should be very proud.

Now, let's get to the moral of this short story. We shared a ride to the airport after a cou-

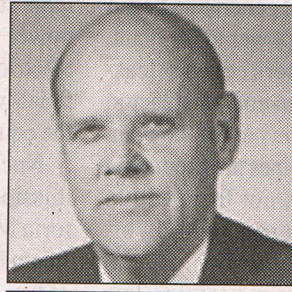
ple of long and tiring days. He was returning to Europe and I was returning to Charlotte, N.C. I will never forget what he told me about problems he had in turning around the European operations and that it had been much easier in

North America. Having "doctor" in front of your name and advanced education is almost a given in Germany. A lot of technical careers are not even started until folks are in their late 20s.

He told me that a lot of his problems were that he had too many doctors and not enough folks that knew how to do the job. He jokingly told me that he needed a few more electricians, mechanics, welders and pipefitters, etc. I need to explain that he was not talking about medical doctors; he was talking about doctorates in chemistry, engineering, physics, etc.

What he was really saying was he needed folks who understood what really needed to be done. Folks who had done it before and not just some theory that they could articulate beautifully.

I think we face a very similar problem today in the way our government operates. We end up with folks that are well educated in Congress who do not have a clue what the average citizen faces in their daily lives. We end up with a lot of theorists who spend the majority of their time planning their next re-election campaign and how to satisfy the special interest groups who provide the funding. We need a few electricians, mechanics and maybe a few tire builders with true life experiences and some plain old common sense with



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the ability to decipher right from wrong. We just do not have enough folks with common sense representing the folks who elected them today.

According to [www.FairElectionsNow.org](http://www.FairElectionsNow.org),

"There is a fundamental flaw with elections in this country: big money.

"Politicians need big bucks to run their campaigns and they get most of it from wealthy donors and special interests. Those contributors expect paybacks in the form of special access, favorable legislation, earmarks, government contracts, or plum government jobs. Because of this corrupting influence of money, many Americans have lost faith in politics and feel neglected by our democracy.

"Ordinary citizens who want to serve in government don't have access to money and are locked out of the system, unable to afford running for office.

"There is a solution: The Fair Elections Now Act would give candidates \$4 for every \$1 they receive in small contributions so that ordinary people, not just special interests, can fund a candidate. This would make candidates focus on their voters and the issues instead of holding \$1,000-a-plate dinners with lobbyists."

Nothing really good will happen in our country again as long as the ones who hold the purse strings are the ones who own Congress. We simply need a new breed to lead us. Good, honest and dedicated folks just cannot get elected as long as campaigns are funded by big corporations, healthcare and drug industry, big unions and other special interest

groups; and there is nothing done in incremental steps that can change this. This requires a gigantic leap from a corrupt system to public financing of elections. I said it before. You cannot leap a deep wide ditch in two leaps. Try it and you will end up in the bottom.

I am not sure that I have done a good enough job explaining the analogy of doctorates in hemistry, engineering and physics compared to electricians, mechanics and pipefitters, etc. What I have tried to convey with the story of the turnaround in my previous company is that we need people in Congress that understand the realities of what folks face in the real world and not just someone with an advanced degree that only knows how to raise money for his election and re-election.

The characteristics we really need are common sense, understanding right from wrong and a sincere desire to represent the people that elected them and not just the special interest groups. Sounds naïve coming from an older guy like me?

I just believe that I finally understand what Dr. Von Gruenberg meant when he told me that he needed fewer doctors and more electricians and mechanics. He really did not mean electricians or mechanics; he meant that he needed some folks who knew how to do the work, not theorize or talk about it. He needed folks that were experienced in problem solving and possessed the characteristics to restore a company in trouble, just as we need folks who know how to do the work needed to restore our country and state. This cannot be done without taking the money from the special interests out of elections and publicly finance the election. Folks elected in publicly financed elections will be beholden only to you.