

Capitol Comments

Common Sense

By State Rep. Mike May

Recently I have caught myself suggesting that our state and national political leaders seem to have lost all common sense.

They don't seem to "get it, " and public opinion polls underscore the point. The president, the congress and the governor are watching their poll numbers tank.

Said another way, they don't seem to have the native wisdom that comes from the real life experience of most hardworking Americans. They have become professional politicians who seem interested mainly in bickering -- in and winning reelection for themselves and their party.

A man named Thomas Paine published a pamphlet in January of 1776 that became a centerpiece of the American Revolution. The little book was called "Common Sense" and sold more copies per capita than any book in American History.

There are many quotable portions but there is one that comes to mind and seems relevant, "government, even in its best state, is but a necessary evil; in its worst an intolerable one." Paine was right, of course, and we all could use a stiff shot of his kind of common sense.

It is significant that Paine's words speak to us today as they did in the early days of the revolution. Those words encouraged, even united the colonists in their desire to live under less government regulation and taxation.

Perhaps without knowing it, many of you who participated in this summer's "tea parties" were raising similar issues and expressing a desire to get back to more limited and responsible government.

I believe Paine's words call us to revisit our core values as expressed in his powerful prose.

So, what is our collective common sense saying to us today?

First it tells us that the major problem facing the nation and our state today is the economy\jobs. Today over 16 million Americans are without work. Millions more have given up looking or are underemployed. In Iowa the numbers look a little better but are still dismal. .

While we disagree on many issues, common sense suggests this is the issue Americans agree should be "job one" for all political and economic leaders.

And common sense tells us that job growth will occur when the economic engine that drives our economy, small business, is well oiled and hiring again.

Small businesses create 75 per cent of the jobs in this nation. But what have we done to small business in Iowa and the nation?

Let's see: Nationally, the president recently called a jobs summit and neglected to invite those that actually create jobs. The National Federation of Independent Business, the National Chamber of Commerce, and the National Association of Manufacturers, among others, were left out. Common sense?

And the president and congress seem determined to pass health care legislation that will place crippling taxes and regulations on small business payrolls. If my understanding of economics is correct that means fewer jobs and fewer businesses.

And now the President is going overseas to promote climate change regulations. We all know that none of the developing economies are going to agree to cap and trade unless Americans subsidize their efforts. That means more taxes for small business and higher energy prices for all of us. Common sense? - I don't think so.

As a state what are we doing? The Governor says we aren't going to raise taxes "that will hurt business", yet local taxing authorities are in the process of increasing property taxes because the state is defaulting on a significant portion of its part of allowable growth for schools. Schools will still need funding even if the state isn't going to keep its promise. Guess who will bear a disproportionate share of picking up the state's portion? Common sense suggests local commercial taxpayers - small businesses.

The Small Business and Entrepreneurship Council recently listed Iowa as having the 41st worst public policy climate for small business. What's bad about Iowa?

Taxes and regulation: High individual capital gains taxes -High Corporate and Individual income taxes - High unemployment taxes - Large number of state and local employees related to population.

Using similar data "US and World Report" suggests there is only one state worse to start a business than Iowa; that would be West Virginia.

Add to those reports the recent revelation that Iowa has the sixth highest commercial property tax in the nation and you will understand why many businesses located here are considering moving and why they are reluctant to invest their resources in a state that doesn't value them.

There is melt down at the business core statewide and nationally. What can be done?

First, we need to stop putting up the antibusiness signs we are erecting in this state. We must retain "Right to Work" status, leave workers compensation laws alone (we have the best system in America), give card check the boot, put a strait jacket on prevailing wage, and leave our collective bargaining code alone.

Then we begin the application of common sense to issues like health care, which have become a major drain on small business. Make insurance companies compete across state lines, create bigger pools and enact serious tort reform, as other states have done, to contain malpractice insurance and other medical costs.

If we want to insure every citizen in Iowa we can find the money. Make all state employees pay at least as much for their health insurance (\$40 per month) as those whose children are being insured on Iowa's Hawkeye Program (low income Iowans). There will be enough money in this common sense measure to insure that those without health insurance can have it at an affordable price.

As with health care, common sense solutions are available for most problems facing this state and nation. Unfortunately, in Iowa those solutions need 51 votes and they just aren't there.

Mike