

SAWMILL FORUM

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Today's politics:

Over the past twenty years I have seen American politics becoming increasingly polarized. It has now gotten to the point that Washington, DC is no longer able to get anything done in any sort of reasonable manner that will work for anyone.

The only thing that seems to make sense in today's politics is all of the politicians' abilities to blame other politicians for the problem. Well, now they finally got it right because they are all to blame. Apparently there is one thing they sort of agree on.

Let me first say that I think the American public should also share some of the blame because they seem to be unwilling to really look at any issue in more depth than what can be said on a bumper sticker. "Get government off of our backs" is a very convenient bumper sticker sized slogan and it sounds pretty appealing until you actually look into the details. Does that mean the government shouldn't be deciding who can or can't get married? Does that mean we shouldn't have our armed forces? Or should each state have its own armed forces? And if all of government is done at the state level instead of the federal level, then we just have a state government that is on our backs instead of a federal government to worry about. Is government intervention or inefficiency some how okay if it happens at the state level, but not okay at the federal level?

This relatively new politics of polarization loves name calling too. Once you call someone or a particular program a job killer, all of the actual statistics become null and void. How much budget balancing has been done in the past by those who were always characterized as taxers and spenders? How much bigger has government gotten at the hands of those who were always characterized as wanting to lessen the role of government in our lives? I do appreciate how politicians seem to have the ability to campaign against the same problems that they created.

I am currently reading a book that was recently written by one of our former presidents. In it he tries to define the difference between being idealistic and being an ideologue. He says "Our constitution was designed by people who were

idealistic, but not ideological. There's a big difference. You can have a philosophy that tends to be liberal or conservative but still open to evidence, experience, and argument. That enables people with honest differences to find practical, principled compromise. On the other hand, fervent insistence on an ideology makes evidence, experience, and argument irrelevant. If you possess the absolute truth, those who disagree are by definition wrong, and evidence of success or failure is irrelevant. There is nothing to learn from the experience of other countries. Respectful arguments are a waste of time. Compromise is a weakness."

It seems to me that politicians on both sides of the aisle are more interested in doing what they think their constituents and special interest groups want than doing what will actually be best for the country. Remember in last month's Sawmill Forum about customer service I said that the customer is not always right. And the reason they are not always right is that they don't always have the necessary facts to be able to make an informed decision.

This also follows in politics. The voters often don't know enough of the real facts to be able to give a proper opinion. Of course that doesn't stop them from voicing their opinion. But the politicians are the ones who are supposed to study the scientific facts and evidence and be able to have a useful discussion so that they are in the position to be able to make an informed decision. And at that point they should be deciding in a manner that is consistent with what is best for the nation as a whole rather than voting the way they think the people want them to vote. And I say the way they "think" the people want them to vote because I believe that most of the people actually want them to vote for what is best for the country, even when it seems to be different from what they thought might have been better. Of course the people only want that sort of thing when they believe that their elected officials have done the needed research and discussion to come to a conclusion that works best for everyone and not a solution that just works better for a special interest group with a bigger lobbying effort than another special interest group.

Of course we have to remember that the media plays a

role here too. Cooperation is not any more news worthy than the proverbial dog bites man story. But when there is conflict, the media is quite ready to capitalize on it, because that seems to be what the public wants. How many motor racing fans are more interested in the crashes than the unfolding strategies?

I think the solution is that we have to let our elected officials know that we are more interested in their idealistic philosophy than their closed minded ideology. We also have to educate ourselves as to the real details of the issues beyond what can only fit on a bumper sticker. With the advent of the internet, the information is out there and easily accessible. And it is now much easier to be able to communicate with our representatives. And it wouldn't hurt to try to let the news media know that we want all of the details, not just the exciting ones.

We should get the message to our representatives that we want them to get back to working together for the good of the people, not just to pander to what they think their base wants. Wouldn't a well functioning government be something that would be more welcome than the one we are currently trying to get off our backs? Just as larger businesses can do things that smaller businesses will never be able to do, the federal government when functioning properly, has the ability to do many things for us that individual state governments, local governments, or individual citizens will never be able to do for themselves.

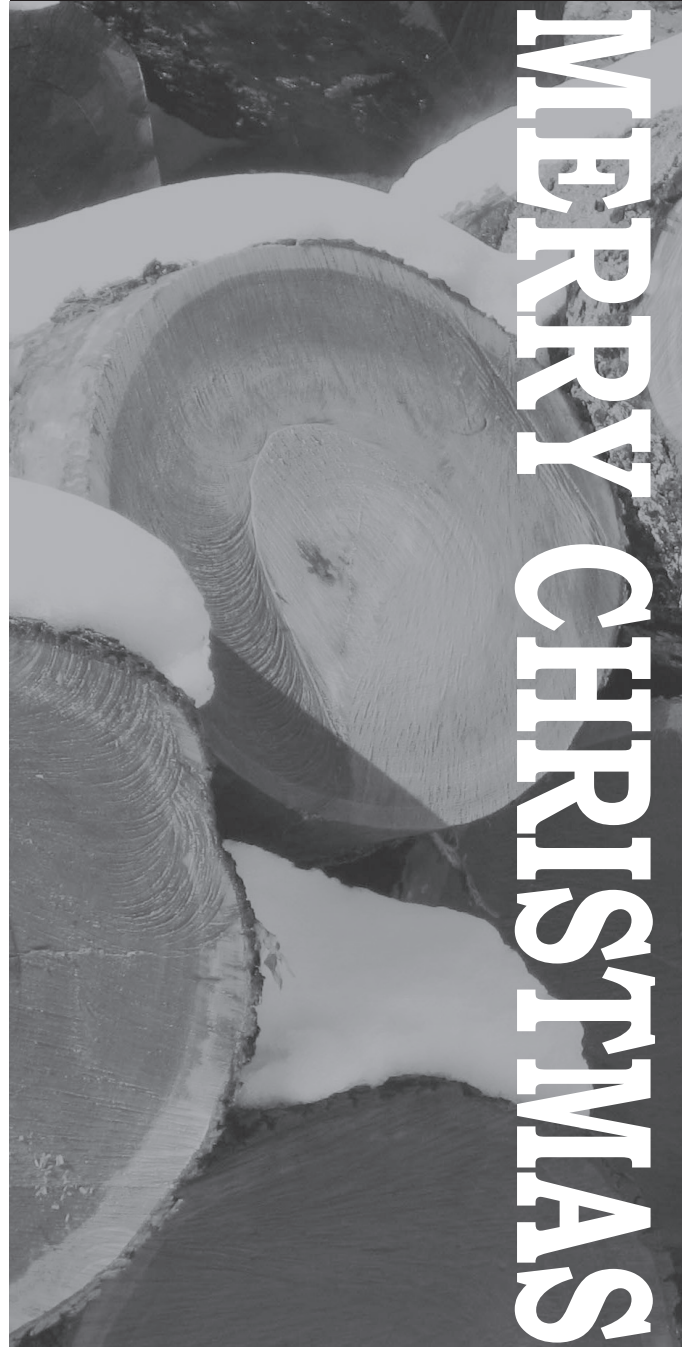
Questions about sawmills and their operation should be sent to Forum, The Northern Logger, P.O. Box 69, Old Forge, NY 13420, FAX #315-369-3736.

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a happy and healthy holiday season
from all of us at UCC.



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