

Professional Club, October 11, 2013

PULLING BACK FROM THE PARTY LIFE (Atlantic Monthly), **or**
HOW TO MAKE DEMOCRATS AND REPUBLICANS INTO AMERICANS.

Vernon Boersma, M.D.

On Jan. 26, 2010 the Senate voted on a resolution to create an 18 member deficit reduction task-force. The resolution was co-authored by Democrat Kent Conrad of North Dakota, and by Republican Judd Gregg of New Hampshire. It had substantial bipartisan support including support from Republicans John McCain and Mitch Mc Connell. (minority speaker) Senator Mitch Mc Connell said on the Senate floor (quote) "We must address the issue of entitlement spending before it is too late. This plan is endorsed by the administration and as I have said many times before it is the best way for us to get debt and spending under control. It deserves support from both sides of the aisle."

The Senate blocked the resolution. Fifty three Senators, a majority, all Democrats, supported it but it could not garner 60 votes needed to overcome a Republican filibuster. Those opposing the resolution included John McCain and Mitch McConnell and 6 other Senate Republicans who were original sponsors of the Bill. Never before had cosponsors of a major Bill conspired to kill their own idea. !! WHY? Because President OBAMA was for it and he might get the credit! This was the first time ever, that a cosponsor of a bill voted against it on the floor.

In actuality it was because the extremists in the Republican party really control Republican action.

Party before Country, also illustrated by the fact that Speaker of the House John Boehner negotiated a deal with Obama about the debt crisis in which Obama settled for increasing taxes only on those earning more than \$ 400,000 per year, instead of the \$250,000 he had proposed before & he agreed to **entitlement reform of Medicaid, Medicare and Social Security.** This was so certain a good deal to John

Boehner it was presented in the TV news as practically done;, but poor John Boehner,(a closet moderate,) had to backtrack because he could not sell it to House extremists, especially those elected in 2010. According to a Gallop pole Boehner's and President Obama's recommendations were acceptable to 66% of the voters.

Soon after; the credit rating of USA was downgraded. Borrowing became more expensive. This was the first time since the establishment of the rating system in 1917, that the USA credit was downgraded. It was based on **dysfunction** and not financial condition. This is an example of the conduct of Congress many times over. Soon after Obama's election in 2008 he introduced his health plan with 8 Republican co-sponsors. Since the plan was purposely almost identical with that of Mitt Romney in Massachusetts it was Bipartisan. The extremists got all 8 cosponsors to withdraw their support. Alexander Lamar, Republican Senator from Tennessee, admitted he had to do so to save his job.

One more example to illustrate the status of Congress. President Obama received a notice from the Everglades National Park that Burmese Python snakes were wrecking havoc in The Everglades and becoming a real threat to Storks, Large birds and all wild life in the park, including Alligators and they were even invading suburbs. The Pythons had grown from 8 to 18ft long and weighed up to 200/300 lbs.. Pet stores obtained Burmese Pythons from Burma (Myanmar) and sold them to owners who when tired of them dumped them in the Everglades. The administration passed on the information to Congressmen, who wrote a Bill to prohibit importing Pythons but it was blocked, by the Republican majority in the House. Why? Because some Republicans said it was a Democrats Bill.

Olympia Snowe, a Republican Senator from Maine, after 34 yrs in Congress shocked her Maine majority saying the reason she would not run again was primarily because (quote)" the sensible

center of the Republican party has virtually disappeared.” Her fellow Republican Maine Senator, Susan Collins agreed. The system of government we have was developed when England’s history was a monarchy. Our system had more balance and was developed to provide **equality of representation**. This depended on the attitude which was traditional, that collaboration and compromise was inherent in our people . Democracy without Compromise is impossible. The parliamentary system which England developed, from 1945 through 1949, is gridlock proof since it is only one legislative unit , and they do not elect representatives but only parties. Each party has a rather rigid platform and the parties, nominate their candidates. The winning party gets to choose one of their members to be the president, or prime minister. An election occurs when that party cannot get anything passed because the people and the remaining parties will no longer support them. That system probably has some problems as well, but the minority does not control governing by obstruction. Perhaps we should not elect a president, but have whatever party elects a majority to the Senate appoint a president from their party.

Is there any remedy for our system? I will attempt to portray suggested remedies. First is the use of the Filibuster . Only the Senate has the Filibuster.

Our Senate was initially developed to be representative of the states and each state was allowed to have its **legislature** appoint two members to the USA Senate. In 1913 this was partly changed by a Constitutional amendment to represent the **people’s** vote similar to the House of Representatives. The idea was that this gave the people authority and not the state legislature, or government. However THE CHANGE could only pass if the Senate was allowed to keep the filibuster. At that time the filibuster also had a requirement that a filibuster could not be closed. The majority felt that it was no longer democratic to allow **remote** areas that much control of major legislation. Alas, due to fewer than 75 votes rather than just a majority, the change was defeated.(3/4 of the senate required at that time)

After 1917 the filibuster rules were changed to, closure only by a 2/3rd vote of the Senate. That was changed again by the Senate in 1975 and is now 60 votes out of a possible 100. Even this is not considered fair or democratic and there is **no** reason for this **too, not to be majority rule. On January 20, 2013, an attempt was made to reform the Senate rule and make it majority rule which would be 51.** But alas it again could not garner 60 votes. Again It did get a majority. It is now possible for Senators in the least populous states - 11% of the population of the USA - to nullify the wishes of 88% of Americans by the use of the filibuster.

Use of the filibuster as a veto has gradually increased but from the time Obama took office, until recently, it jumped from a high of 35 times a year to 112 times in 2012. Even the **threat** of a filibuster ,is enough to scuttle an appointment such as a judgeship or official position or even a law. It is essentially a veto. Even if a Bill is passed or an appointment approved extremists continue the fight by filibustering the financing. Instead of being ruled by a majority we are ruled by the tyranny of a minority. In order to get the Senate to be ruled democratically we will need to elect a Senate with at least 60 Democrats or 60 Republicans to the Senate. The effectiveness of the Filibuster is that it prevents all other matters, (except declaring war) to be postponed. No other business can be accomplished. Some filibusters have gone on for as long as two weeks. They could be delayed 45 days. Usually they last a few days but with the short time the work week lasts, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday with no meeting on Monday or Friday, the Senate is only in session 3 days a week. Even on those days the Chamber is pretty bare.

Besides, getting rid of the Filibuster, a change which would accomplish more camaraderie and willingness to compromise, would be to work at legislating 5 days a week , for 3 weeks a month & one week at home, a sensible suggestion.

This would promote more sociability and respect for one another and leave less time for campaigning or money raising, fewer trips back and forth to Washington, and a greater amount of work time with possible association with one another as well. Not having to fly back and forth every Monday and Friday to and from Washington DC would save time, expense and leave more time for legislating.

Considering Primary Elections!

Many Republican Congressmen fear the extremists in their party. In 2012 closed primaries amplified the effect of extremist nominations in the Republican primaries. Closed Primaries have led to nominating candidates catering to extreme views. Primaries have poor attendance and in the Primary, mainly activists vote. The candidates nominated would less likely be nominated if the voters who voted in the election also voted in the primary. This of course, is a local & state problem and Michigan is such a state. It all began when in 1972 George Wallace ran in the Primary and Republicans voted in large numbers for Wallace, a Democrat, hoping to nominate him to run against their candidate Nixon. This cross over voting caused closed primaries to develop. It seems to make sense that open Primaries would attract a larger turnout, at both Republican and Democratic Primaries and we could choose the candidate we felt would do the most for the country not just the Party.

Open Primaries would also eliminate cross over voting. They work well in the states that use them, such as California and New Hampshire. This way the party does not nominate the candidate but the people do. The top two candidate vote getters are chosen even if both are from the same party.

Now about lobbying! The new candidate does what lobby money via the party coffers desire and the incumbent is defeated unless he too lines up with the party.

In April of 2013 a public uproar regarding the use of firearms resulted in a bill in Congress to require background checks on anyone purchasing a gun from a gun show or store. This was after numerous incidents of random killings of adults and children in Newtown, Connecticut, Aurora Colorado, Virginia, Florida, Massachusetts, New Jersey and other states, often with assault weapons. The bill introduced in the Senate to require background checks on all firearms purchased at any location, outside of from family members, was defeated, even though of the Republican party in the Senate, Susan Collins of Maine, Mark Kirk, and John McCain, and Pat Toomey, all Republicans voted for it. Unfortunately 4 Democrats voted against it. The Democrats readily admitted that they were up for reelection in 2014 and the NRA had threatened them with large contributions for their opposition if they voted for the bill. Ninety one % of the public were for the bill but the lobbyists called the shots. Sixty Senate votes for the bill could not be garnered. This is not government of the people, by the people & for the people but of the lobby, by the lobby and for the lobby, in this instance the NRA lobby. Money is the tool of Lobbyist's. American elections are awash in money. I have to admit that one of the largest amounts of lobbying money is supplied by the AARP. They too demand all sort of benefits for old people who generally are not in the greatest need. Recently, in Sept 2013 the NRA spent money and sponsored a recall vote of two Democratic State Senators for voting for gun control in Colorado. The two were recalled.

The money flow is affecting not only the national elections but national political Democratic and Republican committee's treasuries influence **state** elections enormously. For example in the 2011 election for seats running for a state congress, the national Democratic and Republican Legislative Committees spent more than \$41,000,000 combined, on state elections. This was before the Supreme Court decision to allow no limit to Corporations. These were for candidates in districts representing only an average of 175,000 citizens. I have been getting telephone calls regularly about an election

occurring in November 2014. To help remedy this excess only the people in his/her district should be allowed to contribute to their campaign. Presently a lot of money, is raised for a candidate for a Senate seat - - 9 million dollars. For the House it is 1.4 million. With only 2 years before another election the Representative therefore spends the equivalent of \$2000 a day, and the new Senator \$4000 a day to get elected. We should consider extending a House of Representatives term to 4 years. Unfortunately, that takes a Constitutional Amendment.

The Supreme Court has now allowed money to be funneled into campaigns in unlimited amounts with no way of identifying contributors, using super PACS and especially by allowing Corporations to contribute unlimited funds. The Supreme Court has said that Corporations are legally persons. Yet they are not subject to the same restrictions as persons. This will allow even more corruption, and demand more regulation, which the very same people agreeing to this now, severely criticize as regulation in government. Party leaders control who gets how much, and candidates are soon aware that alienating a party leader is suicide. The political party, with unlimited funds and unidentified sources has no limits to how much they use for their candidate In the Primary as well as in the general election. The candidate is now very obliged to do the party's bidding. If they do the party's bidding they are pretty well assured of a lobbying job in case they lose an election, once they have served. The system is stuck because of the money which is under the wishes of the corporation's lobby control. Corporations, Hospitals and medical schools, Universities, and numerous others are sought out by Lobbyists groups for needs such as a defense contract, or a change of their category such as calling Pizza a vegetable. The Pizza producers now can sell to our schools lunch programs, which require meals balanced with Vegetables, meat and carbohydrate. The lobbyists persuaded Congress to alter the government health dept. rules and disagree with the health and welfare bureau. Pizza is now a legal

vegetable. Kellogg cereals are also recommended for school meals. Kellogg was a client of the Cassidy lobby.

Where else can a University or Hospital Board get 15 to 20 million dollars, by paying a lobbying firm \$10,000/month for a few years then repeating the process for another building or project. There are oodles of clients eager to tap the US treasury. Lobbyists earmarks are attached to new Bills. The Lobbyist's charge enough to get very wealthy, with plenty left over with which to bribe candidates who are then campaigning with lots of money and of course the Lobbyist can then ask for numerous favors such as earmarks to be attached to a Bill. The University ,or Hospital is happy with a 40 to one return all from the federal treasury.

This is legalized bribery with our tax money. In 2006 one of the many lobbying firms in Washington DC – the Cassidy firm- was sold by Mr. Cassidy for 75 million. Mr. Cassidy had been taking 5 million a year as salary, and his portion of the sale was stock worth 11.8 million which he promptly sold to a British company for 15 million. Mr. Cassidy is a Democrat but lobbies for both sides.

There is a great need for regulation of contributions to candidates. Contributions should be only from individuals and no outside sources; as well as regulation of amounts that corporations may award to a candidate, via a political party or PACS.. These regulations already exist for individual persons and legally the Supreme court has ruled corporations are legally persons. Now the Supreme Court is advising that all individuals should also be allowed to give any amount and not have it known.

Mike Lofgren who spent 28 years in Congress as a Republican Senior Staff Analyst recently said “Money has so completely corrupted Washington, that banks, defense contractors, multinational corporations routinely shoehorn their corporate wish lists into every Bill and it is virtually impossible to get anything done.”

Campaigning is another headache!

A suggestion with a lot of merit is to limit any candidate’s contributions to only come from voters in his or her district. After all **only the voters** in his or her district are able to vote for or against the congress person. This was proposed by Republicans 25 years ago, but Democrats killed it inasmuch as they said their people had less income and could not compete. Since that day there is no lack of finances in either party; since most comes from super PACs. The candidates actually solicit funds from Lobbyists as well, and are so busy raising money and campaigning that there is little time left for legislating. Campaigning time and amounts spent on campaigns must be limited drastically. TV ads are constant. Campaign times should be limited to 2 months before elections and lets go back to the time in the 50 and 60s when the vicious, mean-spirited ads irritated even the base of each party’s members. Statistics indicate that these ads don’t convince new members but only consolidate the base of each party. Trashing others, undermining their character with distortions, defamation and even lies, does not arouse **disgust as it should**. We must restore some semblance of public shame.

The finances necessary to get into Congress are awesome. We have to make the campaigns less costly. This could be done by giving donors, tax breaks up to a limited amount , for TV advertising. Perhaps the government or even Congress could get a special rate from the media as well. Some candidates will always have more to spend but at least it gives the less endowed candidate an opportunity to be seen and heard on TV. .

About the rules of operation.

The Rules Committee of the majority in the House, and a similar committee in the Senate determine the Bill to be next presented. They select the committee members to sit on the committees, and can choose the committee chairs. They also select for consideration, or refuse to select, any amendments to be offered. On these committees the Chair is always from the Majority party and currently, so are the great majority of the members, especially on the Rules committee. **Both the Senate and the House can make their own rules,** at every session inasmuch as there are none in the Constitution. If the Speaker controls his party members and Rules Committee, he is very powerful. Formerly the intention was that worthy Bills would be debated, discussed and amendments offered in a bipartisan committee & if they,, would be helpful they were brought to the floor & voted on. But if the Speaker was a Dictator and could control his troops he could rule. The speaker then decides which bills get to the floor instead of having that done by a bipartisan but majority ruled committee, which was the traditional procedure. If the members are controlled by the money from the lobby via the National Party, the lobby decides what gets presented.

The Rules Committee of each chamber should have a chairperson from the majority party and a vice chair from the minority. There should be an equal number from each party with a two vote chair or referee in case of a tie. The rules for conducting business should be dumped and an outside, non-partisan committee of non-congressional, unobligated but reputable people should remake the rules. Should a Bill, for example, be introduced and earmarks totally unrelated to it be attached to that Bill?

Since the early 80's Bills introduced are labeled Open, Limited or Closed. A closed Bill cannot be debated, or accept any amendments and has to be accepted as is. This was meant to control unacceptable bills just presented only so that the presenter could say he had done so. In the early 80's as many as 70% were closed and this was approximately 80% by the time of 2008 when Obama first ran for office. From 2008 – 2010 every Bill introduced in the House was **closed** – 100% Since then - I can't find the statistics - but the only comment made is that it is about 97% now. A closed Bill has had no

bipartisan committee experience, and has to be voted on without debate, or amendment . It is a very much overused rule. In a Democracy, competing ideas should be subject to intelligent consideration and debate rather than programmed for automatic opposition. On June 16, 2013, Mitch Mc Connell, Republican leader of the Senate, promised the Richmond Register News “ quote, If I get reelected in 2014, I will be Barack Obama’s worst nightmare , for the last two years of his presidency” unquote. Now that is automatic opposition!!

Even the furniture needs changing. Let’s mix up the seating and speaking podiums so that the Republicans and Democrats have to do some mixing and are respectful, friendly legislators, especially in the committee rooms. Mixed seating would also leave a better impression on the TV audience at State of the Union speeches.

Compromise is mandatory if Democracy is to work. Alan Simpson, a famous former Senator & Republican Whip in the Senate recently when interviewed by Time said quote, “If you cannot learn to compromise on an issue, without compromising yourself, you shouldn’t be a legislator.” - Un quote There are exceptions to every principle. YOU can compete but still cooperate. E Pluribus Unum, stamped on all our money. Out of many ONE. **We are not red or blue, but we are RED WHITE &BLUE, AMERICANS.**

.

- Of all the suggestions I have listed (See below) necessary in our dysfunctional government the
-
- **Spirit of Compromise** is the only remedy available now and the one to push & demand of your
-
- Senator or representative candidate. Compromise is recognizing that not getting what you want is
-
- the only way of achieving most of what you seek.
-
- As Tom Arendshorst said last month, “Don’t let INDIVIDUALISM OVERWHELM COMMUNITY.”

George Burns: ***“Too bad all the people who know how to run the country, are busy driving taxicabs and cutting hair.”***