



## The Road From Here

*A column by Circle Pines Mayor Dave Bartholomay for the Quad Community Press Newspaper (11/20/2012)*

The elections are over, the people have spoken. Winners think they have a clear mandate while losers deny reality and think the world will end. Neither side is right, of course. But elections do have consequences. If everyone who voted would take a deep breath and look around their community, they would see that there is a path to a better Minnesota, and it starts with them.

It starts with taking off the divisive campaign battle helmets to uncover your ears so you can listen carefully for nuggets of wisdom from the other side. It means truly opening your mind and heart to better understand those you disagree with, rather than to continue fighting. Because in almost all cases both sides want fundamentally the same things: healthy families, children in good schools, safe and prosperous communities, and a fair shot to prove that hard work and good character can still result in success in Minnesota and America.

There are many examples where people of all reasonable political persuasions can find common ground: people believe government plays an important role in society but that it should be as efficient as possible; that although some may grouse about taxes we realize they are the price we pay for a civilized society, and that tax reform is needed that focuses on fairness and simplicity; that our state budget is not structurally sound and that the political gimmicks and shifts of the last few years have only made things worse; that a lack of courage and candor has kept everyone from admitting the obvious - that fixing a debt problem can't be solved only with spending cuts or only with tax increases – it will be a mix of both; that many people of our state and country are having a hard time adapting to a fast changing world; and that we need to make smart and innovative investments to improve our schools while focusing on the economy of the future rather than allowing social issues to be used to distract and divide us.

Elected officials from city halls to the State Capital in St. Paul would be wise to abide by the Four Way Test recited at every Lino Lakes Rotary Club meeting: *Of the things we think, say or do: Is it the TRUTH? Is it FAIR to all concerned? Will it build GOODWILL and BETTER FRIENDSHIPS? Will it be BENEFICIAL to all concerned?*

Imagine if our society stopped rewarding negative and mean-spirited campaigns and held our elected officials and each other to this simple four-way test. Children on the playground seem to know something adults often forget: that what we say and how we act matters and has consequences in the real world.

As we prepare to celebrate Thanksgiving, let's work to move beyond the fear that campaign season instills and remember that we all have plenty to be thankful for. As a Lutheran committed to serving the community, I remain forever hopeful and optimistic that politics can indeed be about improving people's lives. Martin Luther said 500 years ago that God doesn't need our good works, but our neighbor does. And that is as true today as it was back then, and it will be true tomorrow.

So whether you think you 'won' or 'lost' on Election Day, please commit on Thanksgiving Day to try a little harder to listen to those you disagree with, to show a little more civility in your discussions, and to look for opportunities to work together so that we can solve real problems and make a better future for our children.