Political polarization parlayed during Hot Topics Café series

By Andrew Pardiac
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Can politicians show proper leadership? On both sides of the political spectrum, this question has been cropping up more frequently of late. The Older Lifelong Learning Institute hosted a philosophy workshop presented by Northern Arizona University, entitled "Is There a Crisis in Political Leadership?" that aimed to explain and provide possible solutions to this question.

The class was part of the free adult education Philosophy in the Public Interest Hot Topics Café series held at OLLI for NAU on Feb. 4 at Yavapai College’s West Sedona complex.

Fourteen people, including facilitator Jon Vance, from NAU’s philosophy department, attended the meeting.

Vance managed the meeting of minds, but allowed the conversation to flow from each participant, only stepping in to clarify certain opinions made and connect lines of thinking separated by other parts of dialogue. He also had several handouts ready to set up the conversation and introduce points of view from established political philosophers.

Topics covered attempted to first find the problems that were in political leadership and attempt to explain them. The idea of a crisis of leadership and how to define it were also covered.

One main idea the group came up with was a lack of accountability from politicians, especially at the federal level.

The point was raised that elections were used as a control on misuse of power, but that perhaps there should be stronger controls more readily available to people. One comparison was to how a corporation had more immediate hiring and firing control over even top executives.

Trust was another concept the group found important to good political leadership. Though the group didn’t speak too highly of former Minnesota Gov. Jesse “The Body” Ventura, those who followed his politics agreed that he was a plainspoken man of his word, not meandering into political speech.

Money and special interests came up as well, and the group cited that money corrupts and talked about the income gap and some members cited a lack of fairness because they were not part of the small percentage of high-income Americans.

Race was also brought into the idea of what makes poor or good leadership and how leadership begins. One member thought that the tea party — a conservative group whose political agenda is stated primarily as fiscal responsibility — would not have formed if not for the root cause of President Barack Obama’s black skin.

Many in the group looked at the leadership, especially in Congress, as not being well enough qualified for what they do, though most admitted that the job was a difficult and undesirable one.

The ways to fix these alleged problems were much harder to solve than pointing out supposed roots to the problems.

There was the suggestion of a third party in the current Republican/Democrat system. Though the Green and Libertarian parties are present, of are several others, they were not considered by the group powerful enough to make a difference.

There was also the idea that in order to be a good leader, people in power needed to be less politicized to their more radical base.

The bright spot in the argument of how the people could solve these issues was that things — the issues the group saw in general, such as the lack of action after the 2008 financial crash — were so bad that it was causing enough outrage to make their voices heard.

The consensus at the end was that Americans have the leadership they deserve, and not in a good way.

The Hot Topics Café series

Hot Topics Café
• Next meeting topic: What happened to the American Dream?
• When: Tuesday, March 4.
• Where: Sedona Public Library, 3250 White Bear Road.

is an ongoing community program aiming to showcase different viewpoints throughout the area. The next meeting will be Tuesday, March 4, at the Sedona Public Library with the topic of “What Happened To The American Dream?”

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