

OCPA FaxLine Report

a public policy information service for members of the Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs, Inc.

Dear OCPA Member:

Thursday, October 8, 2009

A recent Rasmussen national telephone survey reveals that 83% now view government ethics and corruption as a greater concern than the economy. Rasmussen notes, "This is the first time since October 2007 that voters have rated ethics and corruption as more important than the economy. Voters viewed the two issues evenly in November and December 2007 before placing a higher priority on the economy starting in January 2008." It looks like the issue of corruption is back on top.

The loss of trust in our institutions is having a corrosive impact on our nation. The government, the schools, the corporations, etc., have all had their notable and well publicized failures. In fact, these days it isn't hard to find jokes with punch lines questioning the integrity of every profession imaginable -- used car salesmen, elected officials, lawyers, businessmen, bankers, even members of the clergy -- you name it, there's a joke readily available which shows a hearty disdain. It's sad because there are fine people I know who work in all of those professions.

It's just that our whole society is becoming rather cynical after being disappointed again and again by people in leadership positions who are proving themselves unworthy of our trust. Speaking out of both sides of one's mouth has become an art form which people have just come to expect. It's a real concern because when people in a free society stop trusting each other the society ceases to function at maximum capacity in any productive and meaningful way.

To change things, individual citizens need to adopt a personal commitment to transparency in their day to day lives. Not through mere words but with real actions. This means reclaiming our sense of right and wrong, as understood in America's Judeo-Christian heritage. Each of us must demand of ourselves that every statement, every promise, every interaction be so honorable that we can withstand the closest scrutiny by others. That's the way to make a genuine impact and establish a benchmark others would seek to emulate. In order to address the corruption in government and hold our officials accountable, citizens must first recommit themselves to such integrity.

Then to restore public trust in government we must insist on transparency. It will come with a cost, because power scrutinized often leads to the need for power to be surrendered. Politicians who spend their lives building their "fiefdoms" are not likely to easily give political capital away. But as citizens recommit to personal integrity, politicians will have little choice. It reminds me of the Old Testament Proverb, "The man of integrity walks securely, but he who takes crooked paths will be found out."

As Abraham Lincoln once stated, "If you once forfeit the confidence of your fellow citizens, you can never regain their respect and esteem. It is true that you may fool all of the people some of the time; you can even fool some of the people all of the time; but you can't fool all of the people all of the time." The future of our nation's freedoms rests upon our citizens insisting that their leaders restore such trust.

Until next time . . . Brett A. Magbee, Vice President for Operations

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