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Governor Bullock Should Be in US Senate

A Column by Evan Barrett

December 2, 2019

The inevitable has happened. Montana Governor Steve Bullock's effort to become the Democratic Party's presidential nominee has ended. Notwithstanding his valid effort to advance the concept that national politics and governing could benefit from a Democratic centrist who proved he could work with Republicans and Independents to advance the public good, Bullock's campaign did not gain the needed traction.

That does not change the fact that Washington DC is broken and needs to be repopulated with folks like Governor Bullock. I have written before about how this broken system relies on tribalism more than rationality. "It doesn't take a rocket scientist" to see that our national level politics needs folks who can find common ground on issues of great concern to the people. Governor Bullock has proven, time and again, here in Montana that he can bridge differences between political parties to accomplish the public good.

It's a sad state of affairs when such an ability seems so rare. It should be the norm, not an aberration. That has not always been the case. In the past one could be an active Democrat or Republican, believing in their respective political philosophies, and still be able to both work toward common ends and get along personally. Respect for the views of others, even if you disagree with them, is the cornerstone of a functioning democratic republic.

That is what was exemplified by Montana Senator Mike Mansfield, Senate Majority Leader longer than any person in US history. To quote Montana's Mike, [the way the Senate got things done](#) then was "by accommodation, by respect for one another, by mutual restraint and, as necessary, adjustments..." Mike, as a leader, personally helped things along by doing his "...best to be courteous, decent, and understanding of others."

While Mike Mansfield's Senate may seem remote, its restoration is in the hands of the people in terms of what they expect of their elected leaders and also the candidates for whom they vote.

Governor Steve Bullock is a leader in the mold of Senator Mike Mansfield. Were he in the US Senate, I believe he would live up to the level of character and commonality that Mike exemplified. The measure of leaders is not just in their pronouncements, but in their performance. Governor Bullock's performance as Governor through four regular legislative sessions is demonstrative of Mansfield-like governance.

When most Republicans in Washington, including Senator Daines, voted time and again to repeal responsible healthcare coverage for Americans without any real means of replacing it, Governor Bullock found common ground with enough responsible Montana

Republicans to pass bills that provided healthcare coverage for over 90,000 Montanans – not just once, but twice.

After the US Supreme Court through its 2012 Citizens United decision declared that corporations are political citizens and money is free speech – and in the process emasculated Montana’s landmark 100 year-old Corrupt Practices Act outlawing corporate money in Montana politics, -- most of the GOP in DC refused to join efforts to repeal it. That included Montana’s Steve Daines. Here in Montana Governor Bullock found common ground with enough Montana Republicans in 2015 to pass The Montana Disclose Act which provided transparency – shining light on otherwise dark money – for money spent to influence our elections.

And there are many more such examples. A proven record of finding common ground with the other side is what we need more of in Washington. In that vein, Governor Bullock is in the Mansfield mold. Montana and the nation are in need of such leaders. Notwithstanding his stated disinterest in serving in the US Senate, Governor Bullock should respond to the needs of the country and the desires of Montanans to have more leaders like Senator Mansfield in the US Senate.

Our American democracy is currently threatened by the tribalism of the times. Each of us should seek to find ways to participate in the restoration of a functioning federal Congress. While I like some of the current Democratic candidates, Governor Bullock’s best contribution to the restoration of Congress is to apply his character, skills and personal “common ground” approach in the Senate where he would serve the needs of both Montana and the nation. When you see him, tell him so.

Evan Barrett lives in historic Uptown Butte after retiring following 47 years at the top level of Montana economic development, government, politics and education. He is an award-winning producer of Montana history videos who continues to write columns and commentaries and occasionally teaches Montana history.

(700 words in the body)