Chapter 4

Personalism in Politics: Finding Common Ground in the Legislature

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My purpose in this essay is to demonstrate the effectiveness of an interpersonal model for discourse in the political arena that focuses on a strategy I used for fostering mutual trust with diverse coalitions in order to bring about political change. More specifically, I will note the approaches that I, as a Christian, took to develop coalitions across party lines that advanced a public policy agenda I deemed most consistent with my understanding of Christian ethics.

Before presenting a number of case studies from my tenure in the Michigan House of representatives, I will outline what I mean by “personalism in politics,” and my understanding of how such personalism comports with my Christian faith and differs from the expectations of both of our major political parties? I will then point to some major temptations faced by Christians doing politics, and set the stage for my case studies by describing the cultural and political context for my tenure in Michigan politics. After presenting three case studies, in which I report on how I was able, or not able to achieve my political goals. I will note some mistakes I made along the way, and what I would now do differently.

As an elected representative, I understood that my chief duty was to promote “justice” within the proper sphere of responsibility of government. In brief, justice can be viewed broadly as providing “fair treatment” for every person and group of persons in society. Of course, the meaning of “fair” is nuanced and can be debated endlessly. But, we can often intuit when situations are unfair (unjust). In particular, it is not difficult to intuit when the poor, disposed and otherwise marginalized members of our society are not being treated fairly. And, the Bible is clear that Christians are especially called to promote justice for “the least of these.” But, this promotion of justice by government is not directed solely toward the well being of individuals or select groups of individuals. Government should also promote the “common good,” aspects of well being that can be shared by all members of society.

This view of government as actively promoting justice is contrary to the common view in our society that “government is a necessary evil.” That common view claims much too little for the vital and beneficial role that government plays in society. I entered

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politics hoping to be an agent to help unleash government to vigorously promote justice for all citizens. The political strategy I used can most aptly be called “personalism in politics.”

**Personalism in Politics**

By “personalism in politics,” I mean two things. First, such personalism acknowledges the high dignity of the human person, whether she be a member of my political party, a member of another political party, or a member of the public. Secondly, it means that I engage other persons in a respectful and non-confrontational manner that reflects personal empathy, trying to see and understand things from their perspectives, and genuine concern for their well being. If we engage other persons in this way, we will find that our campaign slogans and slick political advertisements do not address the complexities of real life as people experience it.

For example, a campaign slogan of “tax cuts for all” will not facilitate face-to-face discussions with a recently unemployed worker who lost his job to workers in Mexico, and a campaign palm card touting budget cuts will seem grossly irrelevant when looking into the eyes of a mother whose seventeen year old manic-depressive son recently attempted to commit suicide because community mental health services have become largely inaccessible. We need to draw close enough to such persons in need to be able to “feel their pain.” We cannot truly serve our communities until we are deeply moved by the brokenness of our society and the impact this brokenness has on the lives of our fellow citizens.

Personalism in politics is also grounded in the reality that each of us is broken and limited in our perspectives and judgments. As Scriptures teaches, we all “see through as glass darkly” (I Corinthians 13:12). Therefore, a legislator seeking to do justice must respect the values, skills, and perspectives of his legislative colleagues. Personalist politics is not simply a call to be kind and non-confrontational. It includes both the humility necessary to pursue justice in a representative democracy where diverse perspectives flourish, and the boldness to cross party lines and join forces with others in
the cause of the broad public interest. This will involve “getting to know” politicians on “the other side of the aisle” well enough to be able to work collaboratively with them.

The case studies that follow illustrate an approach to resolving political gridlock and hyper-partisanship in politics by the means of “seeking common ground” with those holding to divergent political views. I attempted to implement the “prism of human dignity” as the arbiter of whether a proposal should be supported or opposed. By asking the defining question “Does this proposal enhance or detract from God-endowed human dignity?” I found the inspiration to build bridges to members of the other political party based on transcendent norms which supersede the imperatives of blindly supporting my party.

Asking this question does not guarantee that one will arrive at the perfect answer. But, it does guarantee that the legislator will have a very different discussion with legislative colleagues than if he were to ask questions which are commonly posed to resolve an issue: What does our Party’s Governor want? What does the other Party’s Governor want? (asking either of these questions indicates a blind and slavish will to support one’s own Party at any cost). What do our Party’s major donors expect? What do the opinion polls indicate? What is the most effective way to get the public to hold the other Party in contempt in order for my Party to gain a majority in the next election?

If a legislator eschews the low-minded politics exposed in questions such as these, his political career will certainly not be easy or pleasant. But, by keeping the concept of human dignity paramount in his mind, he will more likely discover universally accessible transcendent norms that will enable partnering with legislators having diverse perspectives.

**Why Should Christians Do Politics?**

Christians are called into political service as a result of their faith commitment. They are not at liberty to pursue their goals according to their own personal priorities because they are in the service of a higher calling, to promote the realization of the Kingdom of God. And, one aspect of Kingdom work is to promote the dignity of human persons, since all persons have been created in the image of God. Therefore a Christian
legislator should work toward the creation of laws that allow the image of God to flourish among all its citizens. And this mandate is not derived from the will of the people. Rather, it reflects the nature of God’s Creation. As Jim Skillen puts the point: “The normative standards for the just governance of a community of citizens derive from the Creator, not from the people.” What motivates the Christian to do politics is the same inspiration that caused God to send Jesus Christ into the world to redeem the world. But, we must remember that Jesus did not come simply to redeem individuals, but to redeem the entire created order.

When we do politics we enter an arena of public life to serve the world that God created and sustains. This is the same world in which God clothed himself in the person of Jesus because he loved it so much. God loves the entire world as it manifests itself in international relations, culture, media, art, politics, business, education, the environment, and economic development. He sustains it all. He dreamed up its majestic possibilities. When we do politics and serve in government, we serve a system that is broken, and, as Scriptures puts it, in “bondage to decay” (Romans 8:21). And yet we believe that by calling on government to serve the claims of justice and the common good, we are fulfilling God’s will. Just as God allows the sun to shine on the just and the unjust, so too we are to work for a just political order that serves all people fairly and with equity. Therefore, I believe that Christ’s redemptive activity on behalf of the entire created order gives Christians a distinctive and very compelling motive for serving in public life.

Having presented a case for why Christians should do politics, I must acknowledge four special temptations that must be carefully avoided.

**Temptations for Christian Politicians**

The first temptation is *the seduction of power*. Power is alluring and beckons us to worship it, because it feeds into our pride, which is the primordial sin. I use the term “worship” here to imply ascribing ultimate worth to power. I also think we consistently underestimate the incredible attractiveness of power to assert itself as an ultimate end and as a means to goals which undermine justice.

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A second temptation that Christian politicians must strive to overcome is to *give ultimate allegiance to one’s political party*. Being conformed to your party as an elected official is a subtle and insidious process, because to serve in the political arena inevitably involves compromise and difficult moral choices. Being a faithful member of one’s political party is important. Yet, as C. S. Lewis so poignantly reminds us, “He who surrenders himself without reservation to the temporal claims of a political party is rendering to Caesar that which, of all things, most emphatically belongs to God himself.”

A distinctive characteristic of the Christian legislator in the quest for justice is the importance of harnessing the power of the State to protect the poor, the vulnerable, the defenseless, and to ensure that people and systems having power and money do not undermine the rights of such marginalized persons. This is critical because government is often the only effective means of protecting the poor against the calloused greed of the powerful. The following example illustrates the power of money and party allegiance to blind us to the need to protect the poor and vulnerable.

A bill was before the Michigan House of Representatives that would have eliminated a 30% parking tax on the privately owned parking lots serving Detroit Metro Airport. This tax had been put in place decades ago when the State of Michigan entered into an Agreement with Wayne County which gave the County the right to institute the tax to pay for health care for the indigent in the County. The tax raised $6 million annually. The parking lots had recently come under new ownership who hired a prominent lobbying firm to lobby the legislature to pass the bill eliminating the tax. Our Republican caucus was promised a sizeable political contribution, which the owners could well afford due to their annual $6 million of additional income (there was nothing in the proposed bill that required the parking lot rates to be reduced).

The Speaker of the House made it clear that passing this legislation was a high priority for our caucus. But I could not support the bill because no one could tell me how the resources would be replaced to fund indigent health care in Wayne County.

I had worked hard to develop personal relationships with legislators from the Democratic Party. This evolved over time into honest discussions regarding particular

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bills. These discussions often enabled me to ask questions I hadn’t previously thought to ask, and to gain perspectives I previously lacked. As I listened to the impact that the elimination of funds for indigent health care would have on the real lives of fellow citizens, I came to the conclusion that I could not support the initiative to cut this tax. Members of my caucus made it clear to me that the political impact of the tax cut for our Party was minimal because most of the money was spent in the City of Detroit, which was strongly Democratic, heavily African American, and largely low-income, groups that we did not rely on to maintain out majority. These arguments did not pass the scrutiny that the “prism of human dignity” offered.

As a physician, I had some credibility on this issue and was able to convince enough Republican lawmakers to join the democrats in opposing this bill. Ultimately enough votes were found to reduce the tax from 30% to 28%. This incident taught me a very important lesson: In the political arena where large amounts of money seek to buy political influence, the rights of the poor and the values of the Kingdom of God are easily trampled.

A third temptation that a Christian politician must overcome is to avoid the moral pretense and spiritual arrogance that can be significant obstacles to establishing a fully just (and, therefore, fully Christian) civic order. When a person burns with a calling to do justice with Kingdom values as his guide, he can easily lose sight of his own moral failings, his blind spots, and his lack of perspective and experience. Although it is exhilarating to stand in the public square and play the prophetic role of speaking God’s truths for this generation, the Christian legislator must be on his guard lest he sink into moral arrogance by failing to apply God’s moral absolutes rightly. As Reinhold Niebuhr puts it: “Nothing is quite so difficult, yet so genuinely Christian as to remember that in all political struggles there are no saints but only sinners fighting each other. But the Christian faith gives him no warrant to lift himself above the world’s perplexities and to seek to claim absolute validity for the stand he takes. It does, instead, encourage him to charity which is born of humility and contrition.”

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The fourth temptation that a Christian politician must avoid is to compel a type of spiritual ideology on all of society. It is not the role of Christians to impose our version of Rabbinic law or Shariah law, but rather contend for unbiased justice for all. Jim Skillen persuasively argues that “the political community exists to uphold public justice for all.” That quest must include doing justice to all, including those who serve idols and deny their ultimate obligation to God.

It is not Government’s mandate to coerce behavior consistent with any sectarian system of beliefs. Rather, the role of government is to establish and sustain public justice for everyone under its authority. Therefore, Christians must appeal to norms of justice that are universal when attempting to be persuasive in the public square. We argue best on the basis of moral discernment that is shared by all persons by virtue of all humans being created in God’s image.

The Cultural and Political Context for my Political Tenure

In order to create a framework that will enable you to understand my later case studies of how I attempted to build diverse coalitions to promote justice, I will now reflect on the cultural and political context for my tenure in the Michigan House of representatives.

Politics, although rooted in the acquisition and use of power, fulfills its legitimate function when it serves the claims of justice. But, too often politics disregards the claims of justice, and supinely serves the claims of special interests purchased with money and motivated by greed. One of the crises of our contemporary age is that we have fundamentally perverted the governing process. Instead of engaging in politics to secure the right to govern in the broad public interest, we subvert the process of governing and usurp it on behalf of keeping a particular party in control. We don’t so much engage in politics to secure the privilege of governing on behalf of all citizens equitably, as we use the reigns and resources of government primarily either to perpetuate a political Party’s current majority and power, or to gain a Party’s majority in the next election. A Christian

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must be a counter-cultural force in this degraded process because he will answer “In whose interest do we govern?” differently than many of his colleagues.

In this context, the existence of term limits for Michigan legislators presents a significant problem. Money becomes of paramount importance when there are term limits. Without term limits, legislators have the time to establish a strongly grounded reputation. They have good name recognition in the communities they represent. They generally do not need to raise money, and, therefore, are less dependent on their caucus for financial support. In contrast, legislators with term limits do not have sufficient opportunity to become well known in one or two terms, and so must secure the large amounts of money it takes to buy name recognition. As a result, since term limits have become law in Michigan, the political process has moved from being focused outward on governing wisely toward being focused inward towards political control of the governing process. As this phenomenon has grown, the caucus leadership expects a legislator’s primary allegiance to be directed toward the success of the caucus. There is a diminished patience and acceptance of politicians who vote their conscience, because this decreases the capacity of caucus leaders to “deliver votes” on behalf of influential political investors. Caucus leaders know that these “investors” will quickly take their money elsewhere if they cannot rely on a predictable process for securing their private goals.

Is it any wonder, then, that our society now largely sees government as an evil, tax-sucking, bureaucratic monster? In this view, there is little room for thinking of government as a positive good – as an effective means for enhancing human dignity, and fostering justice.

How our society treats its citizens, especially the poor, refugees, the disabled, the mentally ill, and the aged, directly affects the welfare of all of us. It sustains or corrodes our collective soul. I am not talking here of providing food stamps so the hungry won’t rob our homes. Rather, how we do justice (or injustice) either evokes a sense of shared responsibility for the welfare of others, or caters to our most contemptible instincts for greed.

In short, our citizens and our political culture have largely lost a commitment to justice. We no longer believe our politics ought to create a consensus that is fair to those who are most vulnerable, and all other members of our society. In this view, private
action is considered most virtuous, and when the poor are locked out of political consideration, this view justifies itself by claiming that the poor will adapt in their desperate attempts to cope, and through their struggles will be better equipped to support themselves. This highly individualistic view holds that each person rightly rises or falls on his or her own merits. In this view, when government is sufficiently limited, the market place will in itself produce private virtue by disciplining our habits.

What saddened me most about this political environment during my years in Lansing was the co-optation of the evangelical Christian community by the economically conservative ideological and business interests. As a result, the evangelical community, which was awakened from its political slumber in the 1980s, had been joined at the hip with economic interests that undermine the very biblical world view to which evangelicals claim to give allegiance. The well-intentioned convictions of evangelicals have been cynically exploited by those people who already have wealth and power, and don’t want government to diminish their largesse in any way on behalf of justice. Such evangelicals need to hear again the voice of Jesus, warning his followers about losing their prophetic voice: “You are the salt of the earth, but if the salt has become tasteless, how will it be made salty again? It is good for nothing anymore except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men” (Matthew 5:13).

**Overview of Case Studies**

The three case studies that follow illustrate an approach to resolving political gridlock and hyper-partisanship in the political arena and fostering political stewardship by seeking common ground among persons who hold diverse political commitments. I set out to create both political and interpersonal transformation through relationship building. At the heart of the process was listening to other views and judging their merit on the criterion of whether they enhanced human dignity rather than enhancing the power of one caucus over the other. Once others came to trust that my highest allegiance was not to my caucus but to promoting human dignity and justice, it enabled the development of partnerships and coalitions committed to a common political agenda. At the same time, it confounded the political establishment that has come to value and expect political
conformity. This led to resistance, and, at times, overt hostility from my own caucus and Party.

**Case Study 1: Building Relationships with the African-American Community**

My first case study focuses on building relationships outside of the legislative arena. Because of my community involvement, I frequently worked alongside African-American clergy in Lansing, Michigan’s capitol. I began to worship with their congregations on Sundays. I made a commitment to listen, in order to understand their perspectives on the issues that were important to their communities. As I listened, I came to understand better the ways in which I benefited from “white privilege,” that complex social matrix within which I am treated differently than persons of color relative to barriers to opportunity based on judgments about race. An example of the reality of how racial prejudice operates to undermine opportunity occurred in my legislative office.

Upon being elected to office, I offered a job to a well qualified African-American. My senior staff told me I shouldn’t hire him because I represented Howell, Michigan, and Cohoctah Township, which was the home of the former Grand Knight of the Ku Klux Klan. I was told that if I hired him, I may not be re-elected. I offered him the job anyway, but this incident helped me to understand that racial barriers are still present in our society.

During my first term in office, I brought the Union Missionary Baptist Church choir, composed primarily of African-Americans, to the Court House in Howell, Michigan, for a celebration of the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. This initiative served to communicate to my constituents that I would not countenance racial prejudice, and it also demonstrated to the black community that I was not afraid to use my office to promote racial reconciliation.

As I got to know the black community through building these relationships, I began to understand better the actual experiences of African-Americans. I became convinced that the black community did not desire to be dependent upon government programs, such as welfare. Rather, they were looking for ways to decrease the remaining barriers to social mobility and equal opportunity. I began to speak out about the profound racial
disparities in both access to health care and health outcomes. For example, in Michigan, African-Americans are seven times more likely to become blind from glaucoma than are whites. Black men die from prostate cancer at twice the rate of white men, and difference between black and white maternal mortality is larger in Michigan than in any other State.

During my first term, I was selected to chair a House Republican Task Force on Access to Health Care. The expectation was that we would come up with various tax reduction strategies to incentivize businesses to offer health coverage to their employees. While the report of our Task Force did recommend such strategies, it also graphically highlighted the profound disparities in access to health care that African-Americans face in Michigan. The Task Force report was buried by the Speaker of the House, who did not allow it to be distributed to the public. I was told that highlighting racial disparities might be embarrassing to our Party, and could give the Democrats a tool to criticize our Party prior to the next election. I was saddened by this reaction, because I was convinced that if my Party honestly addressed the real issue confronting the African-American community, we would have a chance to build bridges of understanding that would both change our Party’s policies and, potentially, earn the support of more African-Americans on election day.

I also worked with the African-American community to create church-based after-school programs where children could receive tutoring and learn computer skills. I worked to allow the hundreds of used State computers sitting in government warehouses to be donated to these church centers, so that when the children learned to use a computer, they would be given a free computer as a reward. This could reduce the “digital divide” that was so prevalent in urban centers.

Because of my efforts to understand the African-American community and to use the influence of my office to address their concerns, I was able to secure significant open and active political support from this community. The senior pastor of one of the most influential black churches in my district, and chair of the Council of Black Pastors in Lansing, chaired my campaign for the State Senate. The political community was confounded when fourteen influential black pastors held a press conference to endorse my candidacy. My ability to gain the support of our capitol city’s black pastors reflected my long standing commitment to racial reconciliation. Earlier in my political career, I
was also the first white Republican to ever seek and receive the endorsement of the Council of Baptist Pastors in Detroit when I ran for the State House of Representatives in a rural, largely white district.

**Case Study 2: Honoring State Workers**

My second case study involves a bipartisan effort that I led to honor State employees. As the ideology is propagated that government is, by its very nature, unproductive, State employees are cast in a negative light. I came to believe that our public discourse is impoverished and the public square is sullied when our citizens are fed a continual diet that says the government is our enemy, and that it is inherently incapable of doing anything good. To the extent that the purpose of government and its capacity to make society better is denigrated, the body politic has nowhere to go to address the critical issues affecting all of us. The government is one place where the public interest is carried out. It is the provider of services that cannot be provided by the private sector. Among other initiatives, it creates laws that define fair economic practice, that help to protect our environment, that ensure our food is safe, and that uphold our civil rights. For example, when hepatitis infected our strawberry crop in Michigan, my constituents wanted to know what the Department of Community Health would do to protect them. When tuberculosis threatened to ravage our cattle, the devotees of the private sector suddenly turned to the Department of Agriculture for action. And when we had potholes in our roads, the public turned to the Department of Transportation.

I found out that the mentality of constantly denigrating the role of government in helping to create decent and livable communities has a powerful effect on how we treat State employees. If the entire enterprise of State government is suspect, then the workers who faithfully carry out its obligations are seen as less than respectable. As a result, it is not unusual to treat them with contempt and disrespect.

In that context, I initiated a State Worker Appreciation Day in order to further three distinct but compatible goals. First, I wanted to educate the broader public about the vital role that government plays every day in our lives to create decent, livable communities. I also wanted to counter the corrosive message that government is but a burden and largely
unnecessary. Finally, I wanted to honor the outstanding work generally performed every day by State workers.

I worked with Democratic lawmakers to create a yearly event on the front lawn of the Capitol building, during which we provided a free lunch to State employees. We established the Camelot awards to honor workers who had demonstrated exemplary service on behalf of the public good.

About 2400 State workers attended the first of these annual events. Two years later, over 6000 State workers flooded the lawn of the capitol, eager to hear someone honor their hard work. I believe the State Worker Appreciation Day helped to create a new understanding and appreciation for the outstanding service that State workers perform on behalf of the public good, and a new public dialogue about their indispensable role. It also began to promote the important message that we cannot build a decent society unless our public institutions are respected and strong enough to adequately foster the public interest and promote public justice.

Case Study 3: Further Initiatives to Foster Racial Reconciliation

My good experience building caring personal relationships with the African-American community, as reported on in my first case study, led me to take further initiatives to foster racial reconciliation. Because of my good relationships with the African-American community, and especially African-American legislators, I was coming to a fuller realization of the profound impact that State sanctioned racial discrimination had on our society. I believe deeply that God had created all persons in His image, and that Christ was reconciling all people to himself through his death and resurrection. Yet, it became painfully clear to me that our society had developed a pattern of laws and practices that still discriminated against people of color (despite the progress in race relations that had been made since the 1960s). Whether one looked at the inadequate way in which the Public Defenders program represents the poor, or the great disparities in access to health care for people of color compared to whites, or the inadequate opportunities for Hispanic and black children to access quality educations and
the catastrophic impact this has on their social mobility and the opportunity to fulfill their God-given potential, one simply cannot defend the status quo as acceptable.

Despite this, the economically and socially conservative community vigorously claims that government has no role in addressing these disparities. For them, any initiatives to redress inequalities only represent big government. But, the black community continues to hope that government will be honest about the social and economic problems facing them. They would like government to take the initiative to remove the remaining barriers that undermine the opportunity for equal opportunity for all. The argument that government has no business addressing these issues is a sad reminder to the black community of the arguments used in the past to delay passage of the Voting Rights bill and other civil rights legislation.

I believe that if a dialogue could be established where legislators came together to learn from one another, then our Legislature as a whole might be willing to do more to be pro-active relative to the critical issues facing the black community. Let me report on one such legislative attempt.

Representative Buzz Thomas from Detroit and I co-chaired a dialogue on racial reconciliation. We hosted a number of dinners and brought in an experienced mediator from Detroit to facilitate the dialogue. These discussions were helpful in deepening our understanding of the issues. Although I had hoped that bipartisan legislation would be generated as a result of this initiative, that was not to be. Rather, it was made clear to me that by highlighting this kind of across-the-aisle cooperation we would make it more difficult to sharpen the differences between the two parties at the next election. If, because of our coalition building, we couldn’t make the Democrats out to be the enemy, it would make it more difficult to convince the voting public of the need to maintain or strengthen our majority come election time.

During this time, the Governor proposed that the State of Michigan take over the Detroit Public School System because it was failing to deliver a quality education for too many students. This proposal immediately created a passionate and intense outcry from the citizens of Detroit and their legislators. The proposal would have eliminated the Detroit School Board and thus the capacity of Detroit’s largely black electorate to vote
for people to represent them. This resurrected painful memories of a racist past when a white power structure denied blacks the right to vote.

As the debate that the Governor’s proposal generated became more heated, State representative Kwame Kilpatrick, currently Detroit’s mayor, asked me if I would spend a day with him in Detroit to see if we could fashion an acceptable alternative to the governor’s proposal that would both fundamentally restructure Detroit public schools and maintain the right of the citizens of Detroit to elect their School Board. Believing that it was essential to both deliver a better education to Detroit’s children, and to respect the voters of the city, we developed an outline of an alternative plan to radically restructure the Detroit Public School System and to retain the voting rights of its citizens.

Despite our best efforts, we were unable to prevail. Although I was a member of the Education Committee, I was not even able to persuade the committee chair to bring up our proposal for discussion. I was told that since the Governor’s prestige was on the line, it was our duty to pass his proposal without even considering alternatives. The Governor’s proposal was passed.

The legislation that passed contained a provision that gave the citizens of Detroit the opportunity to vote whether to retain the State takeover or return to the traditional form of school governance after five years. When the five years were up, Detroit’s citizens voted by a large majority to eliminate the State takeover; a vote largely motivated by anger caused by the legislation’s elimination of the right to elect their own School Board. The tragedy of the failure to consider an alternative to the governor’s plan is highlighted by the fact that Detroit’s public schools currently have the largest drop-out rate of any major city in the country (greater than 70%).

Mistakes Along the Way

I have told my story of how I tried to make a difference as a politician by rising above the debilitating parochialism of slavishly following one’s Party, by developing personal relationships of trust with elected officials across the divide of political partisanship and race, and by applying the transcendent criterion of “promoting human dignity” as the guidepost for whether a policy should be supported. In pursuit of my
policy goals, I sometimes encountered hostility and antagonism within my own Party. But it is important for me to acknowledge that part of the reason I ran into obstacles was due to my own failings. In this essay, I have argued that the way we typically do politics is deeply flawed. Yet my experience demonstrated my own shortcomings. I will now share some of the mistakes I made, pointing to how I would do some things differently if I ever serve in public office again.

Although I was passionate about pursuing public justice, I was not always effective. My passion led me to succumb to the fourth temptation noted above, coming across as judgmental and arrogant. An example of this occurred when the legislature engineered a $22,000 pay raise for its members. I felt this was a terrible injustice, since we were, at the same time, cutting programs in many areas and the economy was suffering. This pay raise created a sense of revulsion and outrage among our constituents. I felt this action was self-serving. It buttressed the image of elected officials serving themselves first. I also felt this action undermined the trust necessary for our system of government to work well.

Because of these deep convictions, I chose to give my pay raise to the community, and I went public with my decision. This created a lot of media attention, and as I spoke my mind, my words were interpreted as being critical of my colleagues. By giving back my raise with such righteous indignation, I cast my colleagues in a selfish light. As a public person, I felt compelled to act publicly. I could have accomplished my purpose with greater circumspection.

Another way in which I exercised poor judgment was my propensity to air too freely my disagreements with the Governor or my Party. I was aware of how the public felt about politicians who frequently cover up the truth and speak out of both sides of their mouths. I was committed to a different, more authentic course. Yet, at times I unnecessarily antagonized members of my caucus, the Governor, and my Party. Unless an elected official limits the number of issues on which they publicly disagree with their caucus, he is soon seen as unreliable and perhaps even untrustworthy. You can, at times, disagree with your caucus and still retain their good graces. But you must choose your battles. Politics involves tough compromises. A person cannot fight every battle, at least
not openly in the press. Being a member of a caucus does create legitimate expectations of being committed to the success of the caucus as a group.

I also made the mistake of trying to accomplish too many things at once. Governor Engler gave me some good advice that I too often failed to apply in practice. He told me that I could accomplish almost anything I wanted as a legislator, but I could not accomplish everything I wanted. In order to be more effective, I should have focused my energies around a few goals. To be a good legislator, one must balance fervor and passion with prudence, patience, and restraint.

Conclusion

I believe politics is a noble calling. It can be a means for loving God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. The way we govern ourselves is a testimony to our ideals and a test of our character as a people. Properly seen, government represents our commitment to all of us. It is a vital channel with which to build a legacy worthy of our people and worthy of our children.

Each generation of citizens benefit greatly from legislators who are tenaciously committed to doing justice. These men and women are transformational leaders, and they understand that the task is not so much to see what no one has yet seen, but to think new thoughts and ask new questions about that which everyone sees. What characterizes them in their legislative work is that they:

• place principles above politics;
• recognize the importance of fidelity to transcendent norms, as opposed to being willing to change core positions based on public opinion;
• are statesman who are committed to the well being of present and future generations, as opposed to being politicians who are committed only to winning the next election;
• call people together around a vision of “we the people,” as opposed to pandering to our selfishness;
• emphasize our obligations and responsibilities, as opposed to catering to our entitlements and wants;
• are willing to embrace good ideas that originate from other political parties, rather than denouncing an idea simply because it came from the other side of the political divide;
• are more interested in creating a healthy society and being good stewards of a government that serves real people, than they are in securing a shallow and temporary victory for a political party.