



rRemarks Data for April 18, 2023 Village Council Meeting

Agenda Section: Comments of a General Nature

Agenda Item: Comments of a General Nature

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Comment: Comment on DG Election Results

i have remarked repeatedly that DG is one of many places in the US in which democracy is weak. "Weak" meaning the vast majority of the residents are not engaged and don't seem to care what goes on in local government, unless for example a village council (VC) decision happens to affect them personally.

The standard response by elected pols is to claim citizen non-involvement means the pols are doing a good job. This self-serving interpretation ignores the equally, if not more, likely possibility, namely that pols discourage those who do show an interest, particularly if they criticize and/or oppose the actions and decisions the pols prefer, from participating.

Under the current council chair (CC), VC no longer engages with the individuals making public comment during its meetings. CC's opponent in the recent election proposed to address that deficiency, among other issues needing attention.

Conventional media doesn't bother much with places like DG, except when something bad or sensational happens. Which means there's little monitoring of VC activities, allowing thereby VC and staff to say and do pretty much whatever they want, without fear of consequence. This is especially true with difficult challenges such as the fact the way of living in DG (and the rest of the US) is NOT environmentally sustainable (ENVS).

In DG, VC tries to keep resident expectations of government confined to police and fire, garbage pickup, public works, and little else.

Do residents care about anything else in which VC is involved? Downtown outdoor dining, perhaps. Parking? Traffic?

In DG, VC has elevated residential property taxation to the near sacred status of being the primary (sole?) item on which residents are supposed to gauge its performance. This metric compels VC to push for more and richer taxpayers as the preferred means for keeping residential property taxes lower than they might be otherwise. Such growth is needed in order to make up for the many prior years in which VCs, along with the associated grade school and high school districts' boards, failed to collect sufficient tax to pay for predictable maintenance and/or refurbishing expenses of their operations. Predictable projects such as the new combined village hall and police station VCs have wanted to build ... as a status symbol. A facility in which the grade school administrators will also reside. That occupancy paid for in part through the bond issue the district succeeded in getting passed last year. Needed because of its own past under-collection of taxes.

A corollary of this objective is an implicit limit on 'affordable housing' within DG, in order to keep the number of 'less desirable' people within a manageable threshold, the ones whose needs and/or problems might otherwise drive up costs of government, lower property values, and alter the outcome of elections.

Local elections in DG are ostensibly non-partisan. What this means in practice, however, is that the partisanship is kept mostly out-of-view.

In the most recent election, the incumbent village council chair (CC) — aka mayor — was the latest in a line of Republicans, prior ones often using the position as a boost to higher office.

The platform launching their political career was serving on VC itself: the recent pattern has been for DG residents to elect someone on VC to the position of CC.

However, in this last election we saw interesting, slightly different dynamics. Specifically,

- a) the incumbent CC (Barnett) was challenged by someone NOT on VC,
- b) the challenger (Schmitt) campaigned on policy ideas that sounded like he leaned Democratic, for example he proposed a need to re-examine the way VC conducts its business meetings and VC's unrelenting push for more growth, among other issues.
- c) CIW (Hose), who was not up for re-election, is a Democrat. But he is someone who
 - i) does not like the challenger personally,

ii) aligns with CC in his policy ideas even though they are of nominally opposing political parties,

iii) likely has his own plans to run for CC in four years, when CC (whom CIW has described as a friend) is term-limited from running again, and

iv) would likely continue VC's autocratic method of operating were he to become CC.

So who did CIW support in this past election, one wonders?

d) into this mix, throw the curve ball of the prior CC (Tully), who failed in his bid for higher office (after having been prevented by term limits from running for a third term as CC), running to serve on VC again. In his campaign, he even trotted out his old saw — fiscal-responsibility is “getting someone else to pay for it” — as his rationale for advocating DG experiment with video gaming!

e) The challenger lost. But voters (re-)elected the ex-CC to another term on VC! Which sets up the prospect that the ex-CC may run again for CC four years from now ... against the CIW!! Will the ex-CC and the current CC then become a tag-team, ‘conveniently’ circumventing thereby the thrust of term limitation on the CC position?

f) Regardless of what happens four years from now, with the current CC returned to office and the ex-CC winning another term on VC, the incoming VC retains a conservative/Republican-dominated, pro-growth, minimal government majority ... thanks in no small part to the center-right leanings of the CIW.

g) Which begs an interesting question: Where did the local Democratic Party stand in all these machinations? Did it do a Bernie-Hillary and Bernie-Biden, and support — but not all that much — the individual who had the temerity to run as a nonpartisan ‘outsider?’ If that’s what happened, its actions reinforce to those paying attention that whatever their purported differences as members of opposing political parties, centrist Republicans and Democrats feel more aligned with each other and (often as not) operate as wings of a single party ... because they are more afraid of their respective flanks than they are of each other.

h) Which begs another question: Seeing the national and state Republican parties move further and further to the right, where do centrist Republicans’ loyalties lie — centrist or Republican?

What does it mean to be centrist when the spectrum of acceptable ideas is pulled to the right? Do the centrist Republicans imagine they are going to pull their party to the left

toward some mythical set of 'centrist' policy ideas that are the bedrock of Republicanism? What constitutes that set?

If low taxes are the Republican Party's recommendation in good times and bad; it's not a policy, it's an article of faith. Indeed, of late neither political party behaves as if fiscal responsibility matters much; is it any wonder the nation is so deeply in debt? With a Democrat in the White House, however, Republicans suddenly become concerned about the debt. Since they don't believe in raising taxes, the debt becomes a cudgel Republicans use to squeeze the social programs they despise.

To repeat what I've observed before: I don't particularly see the point of praising the village's AAA bond rating when the state and nation are up to their eyeballs in debt. It's a predicament due in no small part to the inadequacy and inequity of the tax system in the US on the one hand (of which the state-level system of residential property taxation is a key cornerstone) and the largesse handed out by government to those on the higher rungs of the economic ladder on the other. That is, debt has only worsened inequality, and will rip the state and nation apart unless places like DG abandon their smug insularity. Judging from this past election campaign, that objective is not likely to be on the next VC's agenda.

i) Which begs a final obvious question: Whence comes real reform and fresh thinking to VC, and a stronger democracy to DG (to say nothing of the state and nation), when the current good-ole boy network arrangement is working 'so well?'

Asked differently:

i) Why do low information voters vote?

ii) Do low information voters realize they are low on information?

iii) Do low information voters in the upper classes vote at a higher rate than low information voters in the lower classes? Likewise, how does the age, sex, race, education level, or party affiliation of the low information voter affect their likelihood to vote?

iv) How do the choices of low information voters affect the quality of governance?

v) When the voting and governing systems the political parties have built is one in which parties and candidates get to choose their voters, is it any wonder those elected to office work so hard to keep voters as low on information as possible?

Progressive Democrats, both locally and across the country, may feel heartened by the results of the Chicago mayoral election, but even that result suggests the task ahead is a very hard slog.

The American Dream has been breaking for decades, and few Americans are prepared — or preparing — for what lies ahead. DG certainly isn't.

How do I know? For one, because nobody takes seriously the goal of ENVS aka the need to live within limits. As Republicans since Reagan have preached, that's un-American. To which Democrats reply, "Amen."