

In Good We Trust

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In God we trust. So proclaimed the United States House in November when it overwhelmingly passed a resolution to reaffirm that statement as the official motto of the United States.

Congressman J. Randy Forbes, (R, VA), the resolution's sponsor, said the measure was needed because of a "disturbing trend" of ignorance regarding the motto and to "firmly declare our trust in God" as the nation faces "challenging times." This is another example of misplaced Congressional priorities and focus.

Our country is indeed experiencing a "disturbing trend." And, many of our citizens are confronting incredibly "challenging times." The trend and times, however, are characterized by a dramatic rise in social and economic inequality and *not* by a lack of belief or commitment to the Almighty.

That is why instead of talking about God our legislators should be consumed with doing all that is required to address these conditions and their root causes. Specifically, they should be engaged in a thoughtful dialogue about the common good, what should be a public good and then compromising and collaborating to solve our problems

We are at a pivot point. To save the United States as we have known it, we need to put things in the proper balance and perspective. We need to reaffirm our trust in *good* as well as God.

The concept of "goodness" has been at the center of philosophical and political discussions dating back to the times of Plato and Aristotle. This is not the case in the United States today, however. Reason and rational discourse have been replaced by rancorous rhetoric.

At the end of the constitutional convention, a woman asked Ben Franklin what type of government the constitution was bringing into existence. Franklin responded, "A republic -- if you can keep it." Given our downward spiral, we are in danger of losing that republic and becoming a virtual theocracy controlled by an activist minority group of the rich, powerful and special interests who will dictate the agenda for the majority and the nation.

In his new book, *The Price of Civilization: Reawakening American Virtue and Prosperity*, economist Jeffrey Sachs describes our current situation as follows, "Our society has turned harsh, with the elites on Wall Street, in Big Oil, and in Washington among the most irresponsible and selfish of all."

George Packer, staff writer for the *New Yorker*, in his essay "The Broken Contract: Inequality and American Decline," in the November/December 2011 issue of *Foreign Affairs* magazine, concurs with Sachs and declares, "The more wealth accumulates in a few hands at the top, the

more influence and favor the well connected rich acquire, which makes it easier for them and their political allies to cast off restraint without paying a social price."

These are not descriptions of a vibrant and vital representative democracy. They are depictions of an eroding value system and a country which favors the rich over the poor, the few over the many, and the business contract over the social contract. They are warning signs. We ignore them at our peril.

What should we do? As we stated in our book, *Renewing the American Dream: A Citizen's Guide for Restoring Our Competitive Advantage*, we should begin by putting our trust in American citizens to do the right and good thing.

These citizens come in all shapes, sizes and creeds. The good news is that we are already witnessing evidence of "an American spring" -- citizens pushing back from across the spectrum to make America, America again.

We see business leaders like Warren Buffet willing to pay his fair share of taxes and Howard Schultz demonstrating personal concern by raising dollars to be used for job creation. We see political leaders like the Gang of Six setting aside ideological blinders to advance solutions in the best interest of the country. We see start-up groups like No Labels trying to bring us together rather than to tear us apart. We see individuals, as 21st century citizens, doing their own homework, reasoning independently, and then taking positive actions to make to our country a "more perfect union."

This gives us faith and hope. While in God we trust may be our motto, in good we trust must be our motive. As long as "we the people" make choices based upon a motive and not just a motto this democracy will endure.

It will endure because we have both a spiritual and moral compass. It will endure because we have both a heart and a soul. It will endure because both God and Good will bless America.