



PERSPECTIVES

Issue 5 - July 2025

Hello - I hope you are having a fantastic summer!

The first article in this issue is a recap of the two salons we've hosted to date, with our third in the works for early August -- the date and time will be announced as soon as it is finalized.

The second article is from Emma Campbell, a University of Oregon student who is currently doing an internship in Lake Oswego, Oregon. I sought her out to write an article because I think she brings a valuable voice to our newsletter and I wanted to provide her an opportunity to share what is on her mind.

I hope you enjoy Chenele's article, "One Quilt, One Conversation, One Vote at a Time: Stitching Civility into Our Democracy" as much as I did. I always appreciate her perspective and approach to staying grounded, engaged, and pragmatic.

Reflecting on Our First Two Salons: Creating a Path Towards a Shared Understanding

As we shared in our May 2025 newsletter, we began tackling Four Foundational Questions which we believe are essential in addressing our polarized politics. Discussing these questions aims to re-ground voters and communities with shared values and a common civic purpose.

Factionalism is not new. In fact, it is an emergent result of our base human traits, and polarization is the logical outcome when groups compete for power, influence, and identity. When polarization goes unchecked, it threatens the fabric of our democratic republic—a fabric woven out of humanity, equality, and liberty. We acknowledge our nation's history is replete with hypocrisy and failures to achieve an idealized democratic republic, but it remains a worthy goal. As Vince Lombardi famously said, "Gentlemen, we will chase perfection, and we will chase it relentlessly, knowing all the while we can never attain it. But along the way, we shall catch excellence."

The global spread of polarization results from one faction placing their beliefs, desires, passions, and self-interest above other factions, who are ostensibly trying to do the same

thing. The value of pluralism—understanding and accepting humans differ—is being lost, which is a tragedy because we can and must coexist. Humans are complex and each of us holds numerous competing and context dependent values. Take justice and mercy for example. These are cherished virtues. We want the rule of law and accountability, yet we oppose cruelty or disproportionate punishment.

A government which truly embodies the virtue that “...all men are created equal...” and “...endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” must not only embrace pluralism but place it upon the pedestal to be cherished and relentlessly pursued.

Over time factions have frayed the edges of our democracy. Our democratic republican systems and institutions were created with checks and balances to weather the systemic perturbations resulting from our dynamic, passionate policy oscillations. With consent of the governed being the ultimate check. It may feel at times that as a nation, we have lost our center of gravity and are off kilter, but by addressing the core issues imbedded in these questions we can re-center ourselves and provide stability and opportunity for us living now, and for those yet to come.

Here are the four foundational questions we propose:

1. What rights are we born with?
2. Can we agree on our fundamental human nature?
3. What is the essential purpose of government?
4. What do you want the government to do?

Salon 1—June 5

Our inaugural salon began with the first question “Are we all born with the same rights?” The robust conversation between the attendees primarily focused on our first question – Are we all born with the same rights? But as we discussed, we reframed the question to “What rights are we born with?” This shift allowed a deeper conversation—do our rights include only the basics of food, water and shelter or do they also include affordable housing and healthcare?

Salon 2—June 30

The second salon on June 30th revisited our revised question and produced a rich, nuanced conversation. A key insight that emerged was the difficulty in identifying and articulating specific rights—but interestingly, no one proffered that we are born with different rights. This shared assumption of shared rights became the bedrock upon

which the future dialogue will be based. Equal rights are after all, the starting point for equal opportunity.

Salon 3—Looking Ahead to August

Our next salon will build on what we have discussed and will focus on the second question— "Can we agree on our fundamental human nature?" Just as atoms are comprised of fundamental subatomic particles i.e., protons, neutrons, and electrons, so too is our human nature comprised of fundamental attributes:

- We are emotional first, rational second
- We are self-interested
- We are hierarchical
- We are social
- We are fallible

One could easily write a PhD thesis or book discussing why these five attributes comprise our fundamental human nature and how their emergent properties impact culture, society, politics, and government. Due to the complexities, our next salon will focus on the first two: we are *emotional first, rational second, and we are self-interested*. Of the five attributes, these two are the root of our thoughts and subsequent actions, which includes pursuing power (hierarchy), companionship (sociality), and results in our fallibility. Simply put, these two attributes are the root of impassioned factionalism.

Our goal is to identify how these traits can be better understood and then redirected to harness the positive aspects to support, rework, and improve our governmental systems and institutions.

We hope you will join us in August. These discussions are not merely philosophical conversations. They are about rebuilding trust and finding shared purpose and revitalizing our democracy.

Social Media Through a Gen Z Lens

by Emma Campbell

The world of social media has filled our screens with new cooking recipes, adorable pictures of cats and dogs, and an unlimited stream of political media. I am Gen Z, and my generation is chronically on their phones and social media to a point where it is damaging society, in my

opinion. I am on social media, and I love seeing the creativity of ideas, and being able to stay in touch with family and friends. What I have found to despise social media for is the breeding ground of extremists and polarizing political propaganda. It is an endless cycle of reposting these graphics and pictures surrounding a particular message. Some of them are not that bad, meaning they fall in line with the mainstream political ideologies. The ones I have a problem with are the ones calling for hate and violence against all of those who are on the other side of their agenda. Mainly, the political rhetoric posts that I see daily use a historic battle tactic -The Blame Game. I have seen this issue firsthand from both political parties. Nobody is innocent in this battle, and everyone is “drafting” Gen Z to be on the frontlines.

During the No Kings Protest, I saw quite a few posts on social media about different signs used and the messages they were sending. One graphic stood out to me. I cannot find the exact post anymore, but it was calling out people who do not pick a side. Referring to the Trump Administration or issues in the Middle East. Not only will people argue with you about your beliefs, but now they are also going to be upset with you for not choosing a side, which means not voicing your support for their side. It is okay not to be involved. It is okay to watch from the sidelines. It is okay to have an opinion and just choose not to post it on social media or show up to a protest. It is not everyone’s cup of tea. I believe the role of social media as a platform for political rhetoric is getting out of control. Social media is biased and extremely polarizing. We are given devices with so much information right at our fingertips. But we have forgotten what common sense is all about. Not everything you read online is true, and everyone has something to gain from spreading false information.

I received my undergraduate degrees in political science and math. I get asked about this combination often. I have always enjoyed studying government, politics, and leadership. I also loved math and needed math for some sanity. In mathematics, it is black and white, meaning there is a correct answer. In politics, not so much. This is the same thing in life as well; someone’s correct path or way of thinking could be different from your own, and that is okay. As a society, as Americans, we have lost our sense of tolerance. We no longer have grace for one another or the ability to participate in civil discourse. This is heightened in the social media realm when people lose some of the accountability for their words or actions.

I recently participated in a networking exercise that had us utilize the room as a Likert scale to measure our attitudes towards certain questions. Now, the purpose of this was to build community with easy, low-stakes questions. One of the questions was surrounding our expertise in at-home gardening. I was surprised to see the number of people on the side of the room who expressed that they are not gardeners. I would expect more people to relate since we are in Oregon. What I loved about this exercise was that it focuses on building

connections with our mundane everyday things instead of focusing on the deep stuff. I think social media has harmed that in a sense. We focus too much on the deep stuff right away instead of building out friendships first.

I write to you today as a human. Nobody with a certain agenda or a label, but simply a person on this earth, just like everyone else. I write to you to see the world through a different lens, one that you can't use to hide behind a screen. We must unite together and understand that we have more in common than we are led to believe. There is money and power associated with us being at odds, and we must combat this damaging narrative. I have seen firsthand the damage that can be done. My generation is so quick to label and "cancel" others who disagree with them. This behavior is toxic and is eroding our trust, democracy, and way of life.

One thing that could better improve our civil discourse and, therefore, democracy is to change the way our algorithms work. We should be exposed to different viewpoints instead of the echo chambers that are created today with most algorithms. If we have more exposure to differing viewpoints, we will likely regain a sense of tolerance. We can act and make changes for the better of our society. For some, this is easier than for others. One thing is for sure: the path that we are on is not sustainable for our democracy. The time to change is now. We can do this through common ground.

One Quilt, One Conversation, One Vote at a Time: Stitching Civility into Our Democracy

by Chenele Dixon

As America approaches the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, we find ourselves at a crossroads. Across the country—and even here in my home state of Idaho—we see an alarming rise in political extremism and toxic polarization. For those in public service, it's not just an issue of tone; it's a threat to the ability to govern, to solve problems, and to preserve the very principles on which our republic stands.

But amid this climate of division, I recently witnessed something extraordinary—something quietly powerful.

I recently hosted a *quilt-in* at my home, in partnership with Women Building Peace and Mormon Women for Ethical Government (MWEG). Women from across our community gathered to create quilt squares—each one a reflection of what democracy means to them and how we might protect it for future generations. The finished quilts were later presented

to members of our Congressional delegation, not as partisan gestures, but as heartfelt expressions of civic devotion. Women all over the country did this same thing. At least one quilt was produced from every single state.

What unfolded in that room was more than a craft project. It was democracy in motion. As we designed and wrote on our squares, we shared. Conversations flowed between women of different faiths, professions, and political views. We talked about our concerns—about the breakdown of dialogue, the demonization of the “other,” and the fear that our children may inherit a less functional, less free nation. But we also talked about hope: how small acts of civic engagement—writing a letter, attending a town hall, hosting a book club, or yes, making a quilt square—can add up to something meaningful.

For elected officials, the lesson here is clear: the antidote to extremism isn’t found in louder voices or sharper rhetoric—it’s found in listening, convening, and leading with integrity. We are called to create spaces where people can show up as citizens, not combatants.

The women at that gathering reminded me that civic participation is not the domain of the elite or the loudest voices. It is, and always has been, the responsibility of everyday Americans—especially those who are willing to engage with both courage and civility.

Groups like MWEG and Women Building Peace exemplify this ethic. They reject political theater in favor of ethical leadership and principled action. Their work invites all of us—especially public servants—to rise above the fray and return to the hard, human work of building trust. As Charlie and I formed Common Ground—United We Stand, our goal was to do the same—to give space to people to find common ground and to build on the commonalities. As legislatures gear up to convene again, we hope to be a space that encourages legislators to have the courage to make the difficult decisions and do the right thing for their constituents, even when there is pressure to tow a particular line or to gain a particular ‘score’ from a special interest group.

At Common Ground—United We Stand, we believe that people come first, above any political ideology. We believe that our shared democratic values and shared love of our country is what unites us. We see people trying to tear that down. There is a constant barrage from all sides of “othering” and tribalism. Because someone thinks or sees things differently than you, doesn’t make them evil. It means they see things differently. There is great value in listening to others and hearing their stories.

Over the past few years, I’ve had the profound privilege of sitting down with people whose life journeys look very different from my own. In those conversations, I’ve gained not only new perspectives but also a deeper appreciation for the complexity and beauty of the human experience. I’ve come to realize that some things I once felt certain about needed

reexamining—and that true understanding begins with intentional, compassionate listening. These experiences have reshaped the way I engage with others and deepened my commitment to building bridges across differences.

Our delicate democracy cannot withstand the fractured society we are seeing because if we constantly tear one another down and refuse to listen to one another and find compromise, we will fail. At Common Ground, we believe there is still more that unites than divides and it is imperative that each of us builds upon the common ground in our communities.

And here's the truth: people are hungry for ethical leadership and principled action. In every corner of our communities, there are neighbors who want to believe again that politics can be about solving problems—not scoring points. They want to know their elected officials are listening, leading, and willing to stand in the gap when democracy feels frayed.

So, as we move into another election season, I offer a simple challenge to my fellow leaders: make space. Create moments for real dialogue. Say yes to the quiet acts of unity, even when they aren't politically expedient. Encourage civic participation—not just from the usual voices, but from the women stitching hope into quilts, the teens attending their first city council meeting, and the parents volunteering at the polls.

Because in the end, democracy isn't preserved in sweeping speeches or viral soundbites. It's preserved in the quiet commitment of citizens who show up—and in the leaders who make it easier for them to do so.

Let's be those leaders.

Membership

Thank you to all our members!

Charlie Conrad - Oregon, former Representative

Chenele Dixon - Idaho, former Representative

Paul Harris - Washington, Representative

Matt Soper - Colorado, Representative

Mark Owens - Oregon, Representative

Richard Cheatum - Idaho, Representative

Sonia Galaviz - Idaho, Representative

Linda Hartgen - Idaho, former Senator

Marty Wilde - Oregon, former Representative

Betsy Johnson - Oregon, former Senator

Rod Furniss - Idaho, Representative

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Contact Us

Joinus@commonground-uws.org

Charlie@commonground-uws.org

Chenele@commonground-uws.org

PO Box 859
Kimberly Idaho 83341
USA

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