

Make R.I. all it can be

When asked about his accomplishments, the legendary football coach Ara Parseghian said; "A good coach will make his players what they can be rather than what they are." This comment has a particular relevance for Rhode Island as the state enters the 2018 election year.

Candidates for executive positions at all levels of government should focus on making sure Rhode Island voters understand what the Ocean State can be rather than what it currently is. Doing this will require extraordinary leadership. Effective leadership is often the difference between moving forward and standing still.

In an article in the February 2017 *Ripon Forum I* suggested five practices that could help successful state and local candidates to be more effective leaders.

The first is to articulate a few key goals and not try to be all things to all people. In this era of transactional and identity politics the hardest word in the English language to utter may be "no."

The National Governors Association advises, "that success in the governorship depends first and foremost on focus." Those seeking to be elected as a chief executive must have a strategy to make the most productive use Rhode Island's people, capital and natural resources. States compete to have the most productive climate needed to attract good jobs and unlock opportunities for all its citizens.

The second practice is to govern from the center.

A mayor or governor's effectiveness depends on the cooperation and goodwill of others. Without reneging on principles and promises it is critical to establish good working relationships with the General Assembly, other elected officials, business, labor and the non-profit community.

Policy conflicts are a healthy part of the democratic process. How conflicts are managed can influence how a mayor's or governor's agenda is received. Governing from the center can help resolve differences and build alliances on specific issues.

We have all experienced what happens when the leaders of the executive and legislative branches are not communicating.

Third is the aggressive use of the bully pulpit by the chief executive. Effective use of a bully pulpit

is critical to garner public understanding and support when making tough decisions. What a mayor or governor can do that other elected officials cannot do as well is to tell the people where the city or state is, where it needs to be and how it can get there.

Direct communication with the public is essential to build support to implement structural reforms in government efficiency, education, health care and economic development that special interests and their legislative allies have long opposed. However, if the bully pulpit is perceived as being political spin it will prove ineffective.

Fourth recognize that good policy and good politics are inextricably linked.

Haley Barbour, former Mississippi governor and chairman of the Republican National Committee, reminded us that voters do not get involved with candidates and political parties because of the delight of knocking on doors and raising money. They engage and support candidates who have positions consistent with their values and who also support programs that are beneficial to their families.

Finally, in our hyper partisan political environment candidates should stress pragmatism over ideology in governing. Mass. Gov. Charlie Baker explained the need for pragmatic leadership when he told the *Washington Post*: "Our job is to focus on what matters most to the people. Is my neighborhood safe? Do I have a good job? Are the schools I send my kids to going to prepare them for the future?" Rhode Island would benefit from this type of candid pragmatism in 2018.

In the private and public sectors chief executives succeed when they implement real time solutions to real time problems.

It would be refreshing if all candidates suggested pragmatic approaches to fix things in Rhode Island which have been broken for much too long.

As Abraham Lincoln observed, "The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present."

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