

2/26/12
Across the
political divide

Re "At cross purposes,"
Opinion, Feb. 19

I was startled to see that The Times published two Op-Ed articles highlighting two people of differing political convictions who say they cannot talk to each other. Both convey intolerant, absolutist opinions.

Discourse with either of the writers would be distasteful to me if she could not be more open-minded and work for the common good. Isn't this what we want from government?

Friends and family members I love dearly are not worth risking over politics or religion. We can agree to disagree, or steer the conversation to other matters. Respect for others should underpin any conversation.

Maybe The Times' purpose was to show the absurdity of such unbending mind-sets and to move us toward an atmosphere of openness.

MARIBEL DANA
Norco

Wagman, the liberal side of The Times' colloquy regarding our polarized political discourse, unwittingly proved the point made by her conservative counterpart, Allen.

Wagman concedes that she "cannot respect" as she did before the "best neighbors in the world" solely because of their political views. Unlike her mother, Wagman can't (or won't) be friends with people holding contrary political beliefs.

"We are not the same," Wagman concludes, and she marginalizes her once-dear neighbors by impugning their character.

Exactly as Allen said: Liberals like to think of themselves as open-minded and tolerant, but as Wagman inadvertently concedes, they are not. They are hypocrites.

MARK PULLIAM
San Diego

The pieces by Diana Wagman and Charlotte Allen broke my heart. If friends and family cannot share their deepest beliefs in a respectful way, what hope is there for this country?

Perhaps my family is unusual. I am a Democrat, my favorite cousin and his fabulous wife are libertarians, my uncle is a staunch Republican, and we love talking politics. We listen to each other, ask questions and concede points. We assume goodwill and love of country on all sides.

We are never going to solve big problems until we recognize that the folks who don't agree with us are not our enemies. We must compromise, seek the truth and restore reason to our conversations.

JOANNE ZIRRETTA
Aliso Viejo

Wagman, Allen and their ilk can't talk to each other because they are liberals or conservatives first and Americans only secondarily.

These writers and those like them need to imagine the debates among Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, Alexander Hamilton, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison. If the founders had taken Allen's and Wagman's approach, our country would not be what it is today.

As Franklin so succinctly put it to the Continental Congress in 1776, "We must, indeed, all hang together, or most assuredly we shall all hang separately."

CHRIS DALY
Yucaipa

Allen claims that liberals will brand conservatives as racists, homophobes, Islamophobes, anti-woman, anti-poor people, anti-tolerance or fascist. According to Allen, we liberals never say "Christmas" or "girls" and cannot even joke about guys being better drivers or better at math than girls.

None of these things is true of me or my liberal friends or family. As Wagman writes, it kills us that we cannot agree with conservatives who really want the same things for our families and our country. Although we have seen evidence of conservatives exhibiting all of the traits Allen lists, we do not assume anyone with an opposing viewpoint fits immediately into these categories.

Allen laments how liberals accuse conservatives of dividing a morally gray world into black and white. But she does exactly that with the myriad complexities of our opposing viewpoints, casting liberals as rigid partisans universally opposed to open discussion or debate.

JEFF PAYNE
Torrance

Wagman and Allen present their points of view neatly and in personal ways.

Each seems intelligent and reasonable. If these two met face to face, I'm sure they'd find common ground.

However, most people are not as reasonable. When it comes to the election, most people will not vote based on any of the issues per se. As Wagman put it, "They don't care who becomes our next president, as long as it isn't Barack Obama."

It's a sad commentary, and the next election will most certainly be determined by voter turnout.

NATE TUCKER
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