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[Return to the Article](#)

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Political Prisms

By [Herbert E. Meyer](#)

[Editor's Note: Women of Washington is a group of conservative women in Seattle whose members meet regularly to discuss issues, enjoy one another's company, and raise money for worthy causes such as the USO. This year WOW invited American Thinker contributor Herb Meyer to speak at the group's annual dinner on July 30. Here's what Herb said.]

Finding myself in a room full of conservative women is always a treat; here in ultra-liberal Seattle, it's a miracle. Thanks so much for inviting me this evening.

Once again election season is upon us, and at every level - local, state, and federal - the gap between candidates has never been so wide. Something is going on here that's deeper than merely a difference of opinion over tax rates and spending priorities. And it isn't just the war that's dividing us; our division over the war is a symptom rather than a cause of our discord.

A gap this wide is unhealthy, because it's left us so politically paralyzed that moving forward on any of the issues we face is just about impossible. Since a paralyzed country cannot survive, we've got to figure out what's causing this paralysis so we can cure it. Let's start by conducting what philosophers would call a thought experiment:

Imagine that tomorrow afternoon you're at a barbecue, telling your friends about this evening's dinner, when someone asks you what the speaker looked like. Most of you would reply that the speaker was an average-looking man -- about five-feet-seven-inches tall, reasonably fit for his age, with fair skin and blond hair going gray. One or two of you might add a few more details: a dark cashmere sports jacket, white shirt and red tie. You could even add more details if you chose: black shoes, and a wristwatch with a brown leather strap.

But all your descriptions would be similar, because you're all looking at me -- and this is what I look like tonight.

Now, imagine that half of you were looking at me through a prism - one of those long, triangular bars of glass. A prism refracts and disperses light, so everything you see through a prism is distorted. Those of you looking at me through a prism might see a tall man with purple skin. My sports jacket might look green instead of brown, and my shirt might look red instead of white. In short, if you're looking at me through a prism you'll get everything wrong.

Well, just as there are real prisms -- those long, triangular bars of glass - there are intellectual prisms, in our minds. And if you're looking at the world through an intellectual prism, you'll also get everything wrong.

Let's go back to that barbecue, and now imagine that you find yourself chatting with a couple from overseas who are making their first trip to the US. The wife turns to you and says, "I've never been here before. Please tell me, what's this country like?"

You might reply:

"This is a marvelous country. Obviously, it's huge. Like every other country, we have our economic problems. But by and large we provide a very high standard of living for most of our people. The majority of us live comfortable lives. In

fact, this country provides more opportunities for people to lead the kinds of lives they want than any other country in the world. We're a religious people, and we tend to be generous among ourselves and to countries less fortunate than we are. Our armed forces are the most powerful in history, and we're all so proud that they defend us here at home, and that overseas our armed forces have liberated tens of millions of people from tyranny."

Of course, you could add more details: American workers have a higher level of productivity than workers in any other country. We hold the leadership in most of the industries that will drive progress through the twenty-first century, such as software, pharmaceuticals, aerospace and entertainment. We are home to 25 or 30 of the world's finest universities, and five or six of the world's best symphonies and opera companies. We even produce wines that win tasting competitions in Paris.

Whatever the details, all your descriptions would be similar, because all of you would be describing the United States -- and this is who and what we are.

But if that woman had asked her question of another guest -- someone who had one of these intellectual prisms in her mind -- the answer would have been very different:

"This is a horrible country, and I'm ashamed to be an American. It's controlled by a small group of rich people who made themselves rich on the backs of the poor, and who stay rich by keeping all the rest of us down. Rich people don't pay taxes at all. You wouldn't believe how many Americans are still caught up in religion, and nearly fifty million of us can't even afford basic health care. We're very racist. Our industries pollute the environment, and our military drops bombs on people all over the world to help the oil companies make obscene profits. Nobody overseas likes us or respects us, and I don't blame them. Why on earth have you come here?"

A Domestic Cold War

Let me put this as starkly as I can: What's going on today in our country isn't normal politics. In normal politics honorable people will disagree, sometimes fiercely, about how best to deal with the issues that confront us - national security, border control, healthcare, education, energy, the environment, and all the rest. What's going on today is a kind of domestic Cold War -- a seemingly endless standoff, with the occasional hard skirmish -- between those of us who see the US for what it really is, and those of us who are seeing the US through a prism. And remember, unlike real prisms these intellectual prisms -- or, if you prefer, these political prisms -- are invisible. If you're looking at the US through a political prism, you don't know you're seeing through a prism and you won't believe anyone who tries to tell you that you are.

This is why Americans who see our country and the world through a prism are impervious to facts. For example, if you say to one of these people:

"Whether or not you support the war in Iraq, it's obvious that the surge is working and that the Iraqi government is finally starting to get its act together. The level of violence in Baghdad is down about 90 percent since May, and Prime Minister al-Maliki has been sending Iraqi armed forces into battle against al Qaeda in Mesopotamia, against the terrorist infiltrators from Iran, and even against that creep al-Sadr's Shi'a militias. Despite all the mistakes we've made -- and we've made a lot of mistakes -- it looks now like we're on the verge of genuine victory. Iraq is very nearly a functioning democracy that doesn't threaten its neighbors."

The prism-afflicted American will reply:

"The surge is a failure. We're less safe now than before Bush launched his war in Iraq. Bush lied about weapons-of-mass-destruction, and this war is about oil."

Or, if you say:

"I'm increasingly skeptical about this notion that the earth is warming because of human activity. It turns out that back in the 10th and 11th centuries our planet was about four degrees Celsius warmer than it is now -- and that couldn't possibly have been caused by human activity. And the new numbers just published by NASA suggest that the current warming trend stopped back in 2000 -- while our use of hydrocarbon fuels has actually increased since then. So how

could human activity be responsible?"

The prism-afflicted American will reply:

"Human activity is warming the earth and leading us to catastrophe. Sea levels will rise, crops will fail and people will die by the millions. We've got to take radical measures right now to cut back our use of energy. It may already be too late."

Well, you get the point.

No one is born with a political prism in his or her mind. It has to be implanted there. And for more than 40 years, since the mid-1960s, this is what the Left has been working to do. While we've been arguing with them about issues, they've been working -- steadily and stealthily -- to implant political prisms into the minds of Americans. They've done this by seizing control of our public education system, and of our mainstream media.

Today, our schools and universities are less designed to educate our children than they are designed to indoctrinate them into believing that the United States is an evil country in which the rich oppress the poor, in which business pollutes rather than produces, and whose armed forces wreak havoc around the world rather than keep us safe while liberating entire populations from tyranny. And the mainstream media is less focused on informing than on reinforcing what our schools and universities are teaching.

Forty years of hard work by the Left have paid off. Our schools, our universities, and the mainstream media have successfully implanted political prisms into the minds of nearly half our population. That's why so many of our elections are so close, why so many key Supreme Court cases are decided by five-to-four votes, and why we always seem to be split down the middle on whatever issue confronts us - the war, the economy, immigration, healthcare, energy, the environment, and all the rest.

Playing Defense

So far, our response has been to focus on the issues while ignoring the Left's efforts to implant these political prisms. In effect, we've been playing defense. We go about our business, we contribute to the campaigns of those political candidates who seem to be competent and on our side, and when we do speak out on issues we base our arguments on history, logic, and on facts. We form groups like WOW so we can get together to talk about the issues -- and to debate among ourselves about how best to deal with these issues - without the annoying presence of prism-afflicted people. We tune our radios to Rush and Bill Bennett, we watch Fox News instead of CNN, and we read *The Wall Street Journal* instead of *The New York Times*.

And we're losing. The momentum is on their side, not on ours, and the November elections won't change this no matter who wins. (Since you ask, I've no idea how the upcoming President election will turn out -- and neither does anyone else. I used to be in the intelligence business, and I learned a long time ago that there's a fine line between a brilliant prediction and a lucky guess. Anyone who tells you how this election will turn out, and who gets it right, is more lucky than brilliant.) Regardless of who wins in November, the Left won't cease working to implant political prisms into the minds of Americans. And when they've succeeded in implanting these prisms into more than 50 percent of us -- and they're getting close -- our country's ability to cope realistically with the world will have ended.

It's time to go from playing defense to playing offense. Our objective is to reduce the percentage of Americans in whose minds these political prisms have been implanted.

Our first target is those among us in whom these prisms have already been implanted. It's hard to remove one of these political prisms, but not impossible. So let's never stop debating the issues with those among us who are prism-afflicted. Every so often one of them - and there's no way to predict who it will be -- suddenly "gets it." In my experience, when you're talking with a group of these people the one among them who suddenly "gets it" doesn't blurt out, "My goodness, I see now I've been wrong about everything." Human nature doesn't work that way. When someone begins to suspect that everything he's been told is wrong, he tends to go quiet. Usually, you never even know that a fact you mentioned, or a point you made, has changed someone's intellectual outlook forever. So you just keep going on faith that sometimes -- not often, but sometimes -- this happens. It's worth the effort.

Meanwhile, from time to time a prism-shattering event will come along. The 9-11 attack was such an event; it forced some Americans who had believed that the US is always wrong, and our adversaries are always right, to recognize that there really are enemies out there who are so vicious and crazy that only military force will stop them from killing us all. Another 9-11-type attack will shatter more prisms, and so would, for instance, an Iranian nuclear attack on Israel. Let's all pray that none of these events will happen. But if they do, let's use the opportunities they provide to teach.

Our second target is those among us in whom these political prisms haven't yet been implanted. I'm talking about our kids. We've got to win back control of our schools and our universities. More precisely, we've got to force changes in the curricula starting with the elementary schools, through the middle schools and the high schools, and into our universities. Only by forcing our schools to develop new curricula -- which really means returning to the curricula our schools used to teach before the culture war erupted - can we insure that our children will be educated rather than indoctrinated.

Nothing will do more to end our current paralysis than changing what our children are being taught. If I had to choose between winning control of the US Senate, and winning control of our country's local school boards -- I'd choose the school boards. By the way, I've no idea who our own state's commissioner of education is -- and I'll bet most of you don't know either. Perhaps we should make it a point to find out, and to recognize how important this job and others like it are to our country's future.

Of course, in all our schools there are some wonderful teachers who are working very hard to give their students a clear understanding of our country and the world. They are like soldiers fighting behind enemy lines. Let's make it our business to learn who these heroes and heroines are in our own communities -- and to give them all the help and support we can. For example, in my community I served for several years as president of our local public-schools foundation. We raised money for grants to teachers who wanted to do something extra and educational for their students, and for which the money otherwise wasn't available. And let's not forget that there are some terrific private schools out there, and also colleges such as Grove City and Hillsdale, where students get a first-class education; these schools and colleges deserve our support whether or not our own kids are enrolled.

Three Cheers for Home-Schooling

Let's also throw our political, moral - and financial -- support behind the single most encouraging, most under-reported development in American education. I mean the home-schooling movement. Today, between two and three million American children have been withdrawn from public education and are instead being educated by their parents. Armed with curricula material that is vastly better than what our public schools are using, these parents are giving their kids a first-class education in history, economics, literature, math, and just about everything else. No wonder that so many home-schooled students are winning national spelling bees, acing college-entrance exams -- and being offered scholarships by universities that previously looked down their noses at these students.

By the way, you can spot a home-schooled kid in a second. It isn't just that he or she is so well-behaved, and so comfortable in the company of adults. It's that these home-schooled youngsters have their heads screwed on so straight; they love our country, know how lucky they are to be Americans, and have a genuine intellectual interest in learning how the world works. As these kids grow up and start their careers, they'll run circles around young Americans who were indoctrinated rather than educated.

The mainstream media is doing a pretty good job of destroying itself. Profits are dropping catastrophically at *The New York Times* and at other leading newspapers, and over at CNN they're panicking over their falling audience-share. Good. Meanwhile, new outlets for news and analysis such as *American Thinker* and *Lucianne.com* are booming along and gaining new readers every day. We need to support these new outlets, and others like them, by talking them up among friends and, of course, by making the financial contributions they need to keep growing. It will be money well spent.

One thing we learned during the Reagan Administration is that the very fact of visibly switching from playing defense to playing offense has a huge impact. From where I sat during those remarkable years -- on the seventh floor of the CIA, with access to intelligence far above the "Top Secret" level -- I watched the Kremlin's leaders lose more confidence every time President Reagan took another step forward, for instance by boosting our defense budget, throwing the Commies out of Grenada, supporting democratic insurgencies in Central America, and launching the

Strategic Defense Initiative. And the more confidence the Kremlin's leaders lost, the more mistakes they made and the more ground they lost until by 1991 the Soviet Union had ceased to exist.

Once we make it clear to our country's education establishment and to the mainstream media that we're onto their efforts to implant political prisms, and that we intend to stop them from implanting more of these prisms and even start removing some they've already implanted - they'll start losing confidence. Then they'll start making mistakes and losing ground. And just as the Cold War ended sooner and more peacefully than anyone had expected, my guess is that this domestic Cold War of ours will end sooner, and more successfully, than you may think possible tonight.

How will we know that our domestic Cold War has ended? That's easy: We'll know it's ended when Americans start doing what we ought to do in politics, which is to debate the issues that confront us fiercely and forcefully, but on facts and logic -- and with a shared recognition that this is a wonderful country filled with wonderful people working hard to make things better for ourselves, our families, and for all humanity.

And when there's no one left out there who thinks I'm tall and purple.

Herbert E. Meyer served during the Reagan Administration as Special Assistant to the Director of Central Intelligence and Vice Chairman of the CIA's National Intelligence Council. He is host and producer of [The Siege of Western Civilization](#) and author of [How to Analyze Information](#).

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