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Be Our Guest

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We can be part of the solution together

At a time when some would say “civility” in dialogue of differing views is at an “all-time low,” the League of Women Voters is well aware our two-party (mainly) system does seem to promote polarization, especially at election time.

The league is committed to helping government working groups achieve more diversity, more transparency, more skill and civility when interacting, and very possibly constructing higher quality decisions that affect a far greater number of citizens in a positive way than the typical 49-51 split we’ve all become accustomed to (or discouraged with).

This type of sharing of constructive thinking can happen while still acknowledging differing philosophies about government around the table. More and more people are registering as unaffiliated, thus forming a third rather large group, a party without a national name designation but an important segment, to be sure.

What constructive action can we take in response to what seems to be an increasing rise of fear and resulting angst among various groups in our pluralistic society? Can we demonstrate that we can all be part of the solution to our current issues and problems? Can a few willing and courageous citizens achieve this around the table right here in our own backyard? Could we share our model and results with other working groups in our county?

The league thinks we can. And to that end, we are inviting residents of Henderson County who identify themselves as Republican, Democrat or unaffiliated to volunteer to apply to participate in a 12-person dialogue group for a limited time frame in September and October. The group's work could be completed in six weeks, one 2½-3 hour session per week for optimal results.

We will select equal numbers from each party and equal numbers of men and women from each group; the final selection will be determined by a "blind draw" from all who apply. As a group, we will "practice" the process of civil discourse by focusing on a nonpartisan government issue to research and discuss, and about which to conclude with some citizen recommendations to the commissioners and county population at large. The league will provide two neutral facilitators to guide the group's process but not the group's outcome. The league is interested in growing a quality of interaction and final outcome of a working group consensus.

We see the world as it has been created and understand only too clearly that we live in a world of differences — of ideology, belief systems, ethnicity, and social and cultural values. That is what it is. If we want it all to work, then what seems to be important is how we deal with differences.

"Understand the differences; act on the commonalities" is wisdom spoken by a South African leader. And from the Search for Common Ground: "It is not about having two sides meet in the middle, but having them identify something together that they can aspire to and are willing to work toward. There is usually something of value in each point of view; the truth of each point of view can be appreciated and creative options can be generated that benefit all. Finding common ground and taking a non-adversarial approach to social change leads to the most sustainable and most effective solutions, and brings along the largest sectors of society."

The league sees this approach as a viable model to help grow a truly informed and shared democracy. It is a step-by-step effort we must continue to make if we are to affect a change toward a climate of civility and — dare we say? — possibly some harmony or unity.

To become an active, well-informed participant in our democracy is a responsibility that the nonpartisan league encourages of all citizens, and we invite all of you to consider this invitation

seriously. To receive an application, please contact Renee Kumor at 828-692-7640 or Nancy Glowacki at 828-693-5257.

****Glowacki is the president of the League of Women Voters of Henderson County****

Link to Website:

<http://www.blueridgenow.com/article/20100901/ARTICLES/9011001/1014?p=2&tc=pg>