

# The Solution: A Rebirth of Patriotism

---

by Charles Peters

---

America is no longer a nation. It is a committee of lobbies. In Washington, the lobbies have taken over. Tax reform bills turn into Christmas trees with gifts for every special interest. Defense appropriations have less to do with real defense than with having something for everyone—a military base in some districts, airplane engine contracts in another.

And higher loyalties are out. Even loyalty to a political party is being replaced by a narrower loyalty to one's interest group, with political power shifting—as the two preceding articles explain—from the parties to the political action committees that represent special interests.

If few are standing up for their party, not many more are speaking up for their country. Politicians no longer ask what is in the public interest, because they know no one else is asking. Instead they're giving each group what it wants, which means, among other things, ever more government spending and ever more inflation.

The only current answer to all this is

Proposition 13. But it doesn't ask what is best for the country. It doesn't seek to discriminate between what are wise or foolish expenditures; it merely says cut my taxes, make things easier for me.

What we need instead of more Proposition 13s is a rebirth of patriotism—not of flag-flaunting, my-country-right-or-wrong jingoism, but of a loyalty to our national community that will cause each person to ask what is best for all of us at the same time he asks what is best for himself and his special group. This patriotism would not preclude loyalties to smaller groups, like your family, your company, or your union. It would simply say there is something else we must take into account—the welfare of the nation.

For most of the twentieth century, patriotism has been strong in America. Large numbers of people from all classes volunteered for service in World Wars I and II. As one who worked on the staff of the Peace Corps in the early sixties, I know many of our volunteers were motivated by patriotism—they were ashamed of the Ugly American and wanted to show

---

*Charles Peters is editor-in-chief of The Washington Monthly.*

the good side of their country to the world. But Vietnam changed all of that. First it killed the patriotism of the educated youth who resisted the war from the beginning. Then even more viciously it destroyed the patriotism of the poor who went to Vietnam and realized they had been suckers.

Two other factors, roughly contemporaneous with Vietnam, also helped turn the American people toward concern for their group rather than concern for their nation—civil rights and women's liberation. Both movements were completely justified. Both won tremendous victories. But they were constantly saying to the rest of the country: give our group its due. The lesson of their success was not lost on others.

I think the example of the National Rifle Association also had a tremendous effect. It was the single most successful small lobby of the sixties. Its message to politicians was vote with us and we'll support you, vote against us and we'll oppose you even if you're the nation's wisest and most devoted statesmen. The message worked and began to be copied by more and more groups. What the message really says is that the National Rifle Association doesn't give a damn about the rest of the country as long as it gets what it wants. And that is exactly what is being

said by all the lobbies that imitate the NRA.

What can we do? How can we have a rebirth of patriotism? It is simple enough. If you're young, think about doing your part by serving a few years in the armed forces—how long can we bear to let such service remain the responsibility of the poor?—or in the Peace Corps or VISTA. If you're retired, think again about voluntary service, giving others the help you realize you will need in a few years. If you're a union member, ask do I really need the wage increase I'm asking for or can I give up part of it to help stop inflation, to help my company's products remain competitive. If you're in management, you can ask how important is your big salary, your fancy office, and all your perks compared to being part of a company that is turning out the kind of products that could make "Made in the U.S.A." mean what it did 30 years ago. Everyone can take a moment each time a decision is being made by his group and ask is this what is best for the country as a whole, is this what is best for us all?

Above all, don't vote against your representative simply because you think he is wrong on abortion or farm price supports or natural gas deregulation. Look at his whole record and ask if the totality of what he's doing is in the national interest. And get involved in one of the political parties—remember that their point has always been to try to bring at least 51 per cent of us together.

Of course I know there are those whose response to what I have been trying to say will be something like, "Who are you kidding?" or "How naive can you be?" But I also know there are a lot of people who are fundamentally dissatisfied with the selfish life, who are ready to be reminded that they're capable of something better. They are not the kind of people who ever wanted to flaunt the flag, but they are the kind who would like to recapture the quiet pride they once felt in it and the country it symbolizes. ■

*Answer to last month's puzzle:*

P	R	O	P	O	S	I	T	I	O	N	X	I	I	
A	V	V	S	N	I	T	N							
P	R	E	F	E	R	S	V	A	G	R	A	N	T	
E	R	R	U	E	E	L	O							
R	E	P	E	A	T	E	R	S	R	A	Y	O	N	
E	O	L	T	I	E									
D	O	W	E	L	P	R	O	L	A	P	S	E	D	
E	R	R	T											
S	T	R	U	T	T	E	R	S	A	L	O	U	D	
P	O	D	M	V	E									
L	I	B	E	L	I	N	T	H	E	D	E	E	P	
I	I	S	C	R	R	B	O							
T	A	B	I	T	H	A	E	D	I	T	O	R	S	
U	L	O	T	A	C	L	E							
P	R	E	S	I	D	E	N	T	C	A	R	T	E	R



Roxie Munro

## Where to Stay in Washington

While most think of "the Hill" as the Capitol and congressional office buildings, there's also a lot of government action nearby, at the Department of Labor, General Accounting Office, Government Printing Office, U.S. District Court, and the SEC to the northwest; the Supreme Court and Library of Congress to the east; and Health, Education, and Welfare to the southwest. And there are only four hotels, so make your reservations early.

If your budget is tight and you aren't fussy about extras, try the **Bellevue** or the **Commodore**. You'll get only the basics—bed, bath, window air conditioner, TV, and no room service—but at very reasonable rates, and both are within five minutes' walking distance of Union Station and the Metro-rail stop.

**The Bellevue**, 15 E St., NW, 638-0900 has a slight edge. It's on a side street and has both a restaurant and lounge (see **Tiber Creek Pub**, below); for a moderately priced lunch and dinner, as well as an inexpensive cafeteria, serving all three meals. The 205 rooms are small, neat, and clean. Singles, \$24-\$35; doubles, \$31-\$42; suites \$60-\$75. Children under 12 free if no additional beds required. One meeting room that accommodates up to 100. Free parking.

**The Commodore**, 520 No. Capitol St., NW, 628-2300, was taken over five years ago by its present owner, who has done an admirable job of attempting to disguise with some style what had clearly been a flea-bag. The **Dubliner** restaurant in the lobby (see below) serves three meals at moderate prices. Singles, \$28; doubles, \$35; suites, \$40. Children under 12 free. Group and government employee discounts. Free parking.

For a considerable step up in accommodations and, of course, price, go a few blocks away to the **Hyatt** or the **Quality Inn**, right across from each other on New Jersey Avenue.

**The Hyatt Regency**, 400 New Jersey Ave., NW, 737-1234 or (800) 228-9000 is *the place* for those who can afford it. If you make it through the bizarre initiation—an escalator ride through a jungle of aluminum mobiles, fountain, and greenery topped by an eight-story-high glass-and-steel skylight—you'll find yourself in a spacious, attractive room with a lot of extras, some nice, some unnecessary but harmless: carpeted bath, digital clock radio, cable (as well as network) TV, more plants, free shampoo, bath oil beads, and shower cap. There are three expensive restaurants (see below), lounge, and with 850 rooms plus 19 meeting rooms it's a good convention/meeting place (your closed-circuit TV channel gives you the meeting schedules for the day—in addition to the weather forecast). Singles, \$55-\$85; doubles, \$75-\$105; one-bedroom suites,

\$130-\$230, two-bedroom \$180-\$300. Government, corporate, and union discounts. Children under 14 free. \$5 parking charge.

**Quality Inn Capitol Hill**, 415 New Jersey Ave., NW, 638-1616, is a happy compromise price-wise. The atmosphere is less overwhelming than the Hyatt, and with an outdoor pool and snack bar in season and closed-circuit movies available on the room TVs, it's a good family hotel. Moderately priced breakfast, lunch, and dinner are served in the **Coach Parlor**, and lunch and dinner in the **Whistle Stop Lounge**. Nine meeting rooms, 340 bedrooms. Singles \$40-\$48; doubles, \$50-\$58; suite prices on request. Children under 16 free. Discounts for government employees, groups, and AARP members. Free indoor parking.

To catch the full flavor of Capitol Hill, don't miss lunch. But make reservations if possible. Otherwise, be prepared to stand in line, for while new restaurants are springing up at a fast clip, they are understandably having trouble keeping up with the constantly expanding congressional staff, who have to figure out some way to spend their constantly expanding salaries, and the constantly increasing number of lobbyists, who have to figure out how to use their expense accounts. So if you prefer to concentrate more on the menu than the company, plan for dinner—and make it seven or later, when the after-work singles crowd has dispersed.