

It's Time Someone Stuck Up for Our Politicians.

I had a rough time with this title. At first it was *"It's really not my fault"* and told in the first person. Then it was *"Cuba's theory of irrelativity."* Finally, I settled on an affirmative statement. I did that because, as you shall see, I have come to a sort of conclusion - but not quite an opinion.

Anyway, this article is prompted by the fact that I get calls and letters and I even get stopped in the shopping mall and asked the totally unanswerable question, **"Why'd they do that?"** Invariably, I have no idea what the answer is. I have, however, determined that the question is asked because I: a.) work for the government; b.) am well educated; c.) am involved in FAEP; or d.) all of the above.

So just because of that I'm supposed to know why any one or any group of elected officials has made a decision about some political, and usually hot, potato. Well all that just stimulated the old brain cells and I think I might have an observation or two, if not an answer.

Let me start with a couple of totally fabricated examples of the kinds of things I get asked. Usually it's an either/or type question. *"Why did they vote to build a new stadium instead of upgrading the sewer plant to save the bay?"* Sometimes it's an "I can't believe it." *"I can't believe they spent 200 million dollars to build that bridge when they won't spend a nickel on computers for my kid's school."* Sometimes it's a "what'd they do that for?" all by itself. *"What'd they expand that intersection for? There's too much traffic here already."*

Some of the figures that get kicked around are pretty big too. A bridge recently came in at \$150 million. Stadiums run around \$200 million. Dredging passes can run several million. Intersections and roads are expensive, but not quite so much. On the "didn't build" side of the equation are parks, retrofit treatment ponds, flood plain or habitat restoration, pretty much anything with schools, crime prevention, jails, and teacher salaries.

If you want to get totally confused, toss in bullet trains, beach nourishment, wellfield protection, wellfield development, desalinization, pipelines, ports, marinas, clean air, clean water, endangered species and that's off the top of my head.

Well frankly I'm getting a little bit tired of the whole thing. I pondered the choices the elected folks had pondered. Why build a bridge instead of restoring a creek? The cost was the same. The benefits are so different they may not compare well. Why build a stadium instead of a school? What's the public benefit of the two? How do they choose?

Then it hit me that the elected officials had been absolutely correct in each of these instances. They had done the right thing. As a matter of fact, the more I thought about it, the more I thought that they had done the right thing more often than anyone would give them credit for. What it comes down to is that we were asking the wrong question. They never chose a bridge over a school. They never chose a renourished beach over a better land fill.

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The bottom line is that these folks were not elected to be babysitters and keep us all in line doing the right thing for all of us all the time. They were elected to *represent* us. They represent the *collective us*, not the individual *us*. "*But they're supposed to be leaders*", you say. And you would be correct. But they are supposed to lead the people where the people want to go, not where they themselves would go. They work for us.

If we accept that, then it becomes real clear that they didn't choose one project over another and never have. They have always listened to an idea, listened to the proponents and opponents, and done what they thought most of the people wanted. Building a bridge comes from a lot of people telling the politician a bridge is needed. Building a stadium comes from people saying one is needed. If the politician received more calls against the stadium than for it, he probably would vote against it. It's not a choice of one project over another, it's a choice of whether enough people support a project to spend tax dollars on it.

The answer to the question then is, "*because you didn't get involved and make your voices heard.*" And that will always be the answer. If you want a new school; if you want clean water; if you want a new intersection; if you want less crime; tell your elected employee, and tell him often, and tell him he can spend your taxes to get it for you. My guess is that he'll listen.